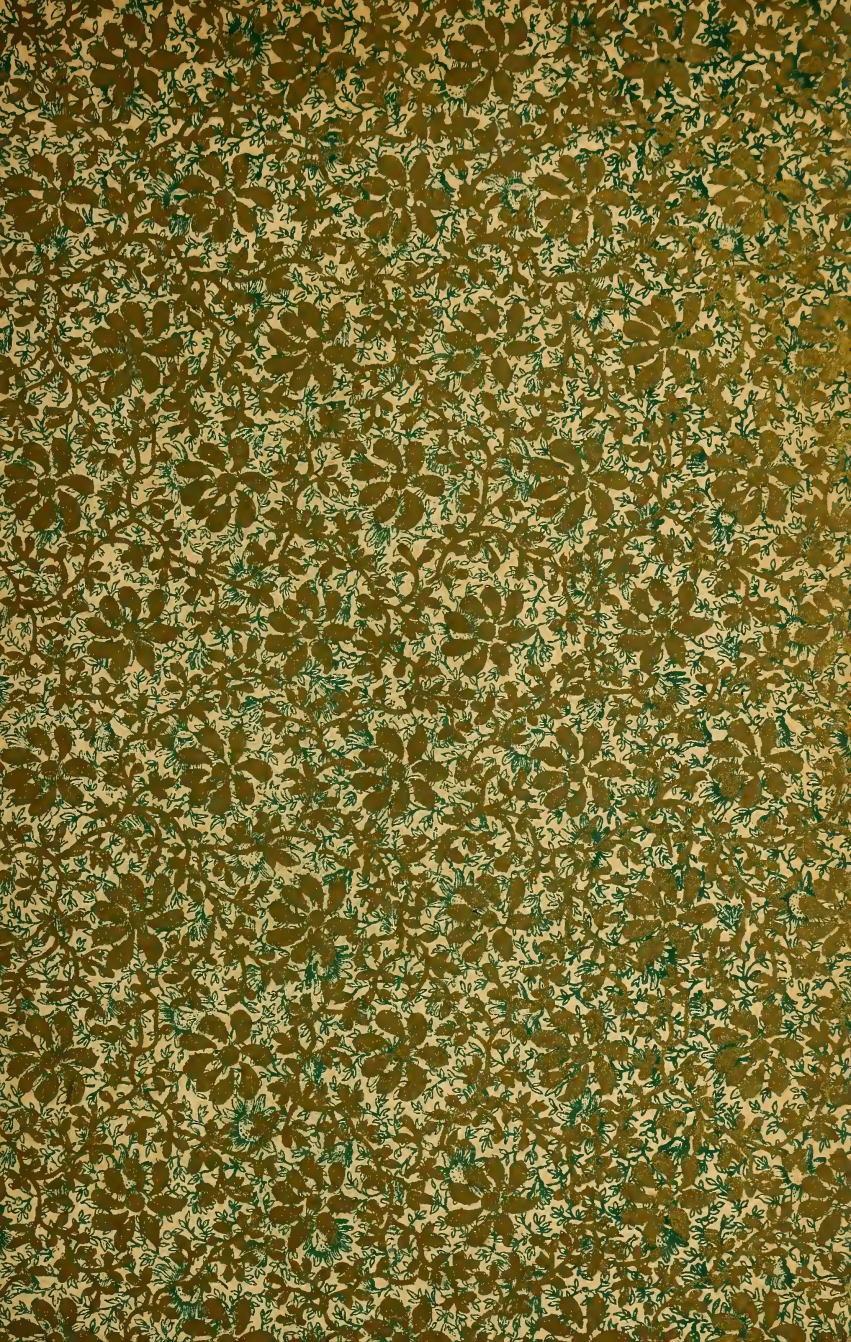




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ETC.

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN ETC.



WITH A FRONTISPIECE BY A. FORESTIER

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PREFACE

14 Oct. 53. Clark

It may be necessary—it is at least advisable—in order to avert the possibility of misunderstanding, to state that the disease of ‘Religiosity’ which is treated in the first of the stories included in this volume must not be confounded with the profession, possession, gift of, or desire for, religious faith. Everyone has observed with what singular ease certain natures assume the external signs and gestures which simulate the phases of the religious life. To attend services with pleasure; to sing hymns with unction; to hear exhortations with joy; to make exhortations with earnestness;—may become as much a habit, may mean as little, as the taking of a cup of tea. Everyone knows cases in which the outward forms of the religious life have been carried on with zeal and fidelity, while the inner life—the conduct of life—the daily conversation—seems wholly untouched. The world holds up accusing hands and cries out ‘Hypocrite!’ The world is not always right. The man, not a conscious hypocrite, may find a certain happiness in his emotions; he may not connect them in the least with things practical; he may, in fact, be suffering from Religiosity.

Paul Leighan, in the story which follows, is a victim to Religiosity. He explains himself in his history; with a real love for things ecclesiastical, he

has no religion at all, no principles, no morals, no honour. But he has Religiosity.

It has been my lot to know several victims of this strange disease. One such—who is now dead—in the intervals of the Church services, which he ardently loved, found time to bring a fraudulent action against a company for damages on account of an alleged accident. He swore in open court that he was confined to his bed for a certain number of months, or weeks, in consequence of this accident. He won his case, with substantial damages. Another man, who knew that he was only in the most trifling manner injured by the accident, that his evidence was perjury, and that his claim was iniquity, refused afterwards to speak to him. The good man—the perjured person—was deeply pained, and remembered this harshness in his prayers—quite earnestly. Another I knew to whom a certain amount of Religiosity was periodically necessary. He obtained his emotions by wearing a cassock down to his heels and by carrying a banner at a Ritualist church. For the rest of the week he was an Atheist—advanced and aggressive. ‘But,’ he said, ‘I must have my Fetish.’

‘In Deacon’s Orders’ has appeared in the papers which support Tillotson’s Syndicate. The other stories in this volume have appeared in ‘The Pall Mall Magazine,’ ‘Black and White,’ ‘The Strand,’ ‘The Illustrated London News,’ ‘The Humanitarian,’ and ‘The Idler.’

W. B.

UNITED UNIVERSITY CLUB.
Dec. 1894.

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IN DEACON'S ORDERS

CHAPTER I

IMPEDIMENT OR NOTABLE CRIME

THERE is always a considerable congregation in the old Cathedral on the day appointed for the ordering of priests. Of course the church is not nearly full; it is impossible to fill it; even if the whole town were to assist at the function the enormous nave would not be half filled. As it is, the chancel on such occasions is always full, and a good part of the space under the central tower is occupied with people, nearly all of them ladies. The ordering of priests, which thus attracts so large a congregation, is, it must be acknowledged, a very impressive and solemn ceremony. The powers conferred by the Bishop upon the young men then ordered are by some enthusiasts interpreted literally to be really as tremendous as the words of the Rubric literally mean. It is, again, interesting, and even pathetic, to see a body of young men—for the most part not five-and-twenty—solemnly and in the face of the world entering upon vows by virtue of which they are pledged henceforth to give up the whole of their lives, with all their time, all their intellect, all their soul, and all their strength, to the

work of the Church, and to make of themselves 'wholesome examples and patterns to the flock of Christ.' Wherefore, says the Bishop, 'consider with yourselves the end of your ministry . . . see that you never cease your labour, your care and diligence, until you have done all that lieth in you, according to your bounden duty . . . that there be no place left among you, either for error in religion or for viciousness in life.' It is the renunciation of the world ; it is a taking of the veil ; these young men are henceforth set apart ; their companions, their conversation, their studies, their recreations can never again be as they were ; even if they should become bankrupts in faith—a most terrible disaster for one who has thus been ordered—and were to 'take the benefit of the Act' and put off the style and title, the dress and profession of cleric, they would remain still separate and apart from other men ; they can never again be the same ; the ecclesiastic never becomes really a layman ; he falls into extravagancies when he makes the attempt ; for the rest of his life he is haunted with the memory of his former profession. The white collar binds his neck, the cassock binds his limbs ; surplice, hood, cassock, collar and hat—he can never shake them off ; they remain upon him though the world sees them not. He is haunted, he is plagued, he is followed by the words of his vows, by the ordering of the Bishop ; by his separation and solemn dedication. Act of Parliament or not, this ordering, once accepted, is a life-sentence, like a peerage.

This was an ordination in spring. Outside, in the quiet, beautiful close, with its great trees and level sward and low old houses surrounded by flower gar-

dens and covered with creepers, the returning swallows darted about, the laburnums and the lilacs were in blossom, the wisteria was beginning; the primrose and the first spring flowers were in blossom after a long winter; light clouds flew across the sky with a north-west breeze making fitful shade and chasing sunshine on the turf; in the Cathedral the sun lit up the woodwork and illuminated the rose of the south transept and showed the splendour of the carved marbles and covered the heads of the candidates with glory or with a halo of promise.

The chancel, I say, was quite full; the venerable Bishop sat in the chair within the altar rails on the north side—unless it was the south perhaps, or the west or the east; the venerable Dean was in his place, the left hand stall as you go in, under a miraculous canopy carved when there were giants in the world; the venerable Archdeacon sat in his place ready to get up and advance to the Bishop; the venerable canons and the venerable honorary canons sat in their stalls; the minor canons, tolerably venerable, in theirs; the vergers, in long black gowns, stood outside the chancel: they also were venerable, because nobody at this Cathedral is permitted to hold any office under the age of eighty except the minor canons aforesaid and the choir boys. The church is very old—most of it is Norman work, twelfth century; the trees, the garden, the houses of the close are old; the tombs of the church are old; the clergy are old; it is a Temple of Old Age; the people belonging to it are all so old that it is impossible for them to get any older. Why should they? Sometimes they forget to wake in the morning, or they fall asleep in the daytime; so changes occur

from time to time, but they never get any older to look at.

The candidates, of whom there were some twenty, sat in their places below the stalls. They were, for the most part, quite young men—not more than five-and-twenty as an average—of the usual honest English stamp, that is to say, large of limb, square of shoulder, deep of chest, their faces greatly awed by the solemnity of the occasion and the gravity of the vows they were about to make, when the Bishop, sitting in his chair, should put certain momentous questions to them and they should reply in certain momentous words, pledging themselves to things very serious indeed.

Among the candidates was one whose face and bearing attracted the attention of everyone present. He was a tall young man with rather narrow shoulders; his hair, so dark as to be nearly black, was parted at the side, which is much more effective than the usual down-the-middle style. During the Morning Prayer, which precedes the ordering, he showed, apparently without the least knowledge that anyone was observing him (although one or two afterwards said that he had been all the time acting), a fervour of devotion amounting almost to rapture. He seemed, especially to the girls who watched him from their places, almost carried out of himself. In the Psalms he sang, but with notes subdued, a fine tenor; during the prayers the sun through the painted windows fell upon his upturned face so that it glowed with a light unearthly. And such a face! It was pale, the features were straight and regular, the forehead was high and narrow, the eyes were large, limpid, and dark, the lip

and chin were smooth, but the cheek was lightly touched with the down of boyhood ignorant as yet of razor. It was the face of a poet, of one who believes without doubt or question; of an orator who persuades not by fire but by the intensity of his own belief; of an ideal priest. It was a face never to be forgotten.

When Morning Prayer was ended a sermon was preached by a certain learned divine. He did somewhat magnify the greatness of ordering, and did somewhat unduly dwell upon the powers and the privileges of those ordered. But then the Rubric enjoins such a charge on this occasion. Since he also dwelt upon corresponding responsibilities and duties, and since he drew a most horrific picture of the wicked priest, he may be forgiven—and, indeed, we are not called upon in this place to hear that sermon. It was remarked by many, especially of the other sex, that the young man of the ethereal beauty and spiritual look sat throughout the sermon in a kind of ecstasy, his lovely face always bathed with that soft painted sunshine and his eyes uplifted with the far-off gaze of heavenly rapture.

When the sermon was finished, the venerable Archdeacon arose in his place; the candidates all rose in theirs, and without any professional order, yet without confusion, the latter arranged themselves, being all 'decently habited,' obediently to the Rubric, in surplice and hood, before the altar rails. Then the Archdeacon addressed the Bishop.

'Reverend Father in God, I present unto you these persons present to be admitted to the Order of Priesthood.'

And the Bishop made reply, saying, 'Take heed

that the persons whom ye present unto me be apt and meet, for their learning and godly conversation, to exercise their ministry duly, to the honour of God and the edifying of the Church.'

'I have inquired of them,' said the Archdeacon, cautiously, 'and also examined them, and I think them so to be.'

Then the Bishop turned unto the people and addressed them.

'Good people, these are they whom we purpose, God willing, to receive this day into the holy office of Priesthood. For after due examination we find not to the contrary, but that they be lawfully called to these Function and Ministry, and that they be persons meet for the same. But yet if there be any of you who knoweth any impediment, or notable crime, in any of them, for the which he ought not to be received into this Holy Ministry, let him come forth in the name of God and show what the crime or impediment is.'

After this formal invitation the service as a rule proceeds without waiting.

On this occasion a very remarkable thing happened—a thing that had never occurred in the memory of the oldest person present—a thing almost unknown in the annals of the Church. It may have happened: everything possible *has* happened: but no one remembers such a thing. For a woman, dressed in black, closely veiled, who had been sitting quietly under the central tower, rose and walked rapidly up the church, the venerable vergers trotting after her in vain, through the astonished lines of canons, priests, minor canons, honorary canons, singers, boys and

ladies, straight to the Archdeacon. To him she delivered a folded paper.

This done, she turned and walked back again. But not to her seat under the tower; she walked straight down the nave and out of the church.

The priest who was about to begin the Litany paused, seeing this marvel. The Archdeacon opened and read the paper. Then he stepped to the altar rails, where the Bishop met him and also read the paper. They conferred together for a few moments. Then the Archdeacon, with grave and troubled face, while all the people looked on with bated breath, turned round and looked at the row of candidates. A profane person who was present afterwards declared that every man of them turned first red and then pale, and that one expression appeared simultaneously upon every face, and that it cried aloud, 'Good Lord! What has come out now?' But this report was invented afterwards. It grew up in the telling of the story.

The Archdeacon stepped to the young man whose beauty and fervour had awakened so much admiration, and showed him the paper, whispering.

Heavens! This candidate read it; he betrayed no emotion; he did not change colour; he read the paper calmly and he returned it to the Archdeacon. The Archdeacon whispered with him for a few moments. Then, with pale face and drooping eyes, this young man turned, and leaving the candidates he walked down the chancel, every eye upon him, every face asking silently, 'Young man, what is thy crime? Of what nature is this impediment?' Heard one ever the like? For, without a doubt, this

woman must have disclosed some impediment or notable crime. When he passed through the screen he walked slowly down the steps, stopped at the bottom, threw off surplice and hood, folded them, laid them solemnly on the stones, and then, kneeling, threw himself forward with his arms out, in an attitude of abject self-abasement and prayer. In a few moments he arose, and with hanging head walked down the long nave, the people turning, craning their necks to see him, and so out of the western gate. He came to the Cathedral rapt in an ecstasy of faith; he left it clothed in visible shame and unconcealed abasement. Both, to some who scoffed, seemed theatrical.

When he had gone, the people with one consent sighed heavily; and some of the girls, especially in the chancel, where he had shown to such great advantage, began softly and secretly to shed tears. What had this lovely young man done that, on the very threshold of the Holy of Holies, he should be turned back and cast upon the world?

The local weekly, which appeared next day, described the incident briefly. It was a thing beyond the powers of the local reporter; he neither saw the wonder nor the tragedy of it. To him it was only a thing unusual. He had not even been able to learn the circumstances of the case. No one knew the nature of the impediment or notable crime charged upon the candidate by the veiled woman. The Arch-deacon preserved silence upon these points. So did the Bishop. Nevertheless, partly because the young man was not a stranger to all the other candidates, it presently became known and was published in all the

papers in the islands of Great Britain and Ireland that his name was Philip Cannington Leighan, Bachelor of Arts, formerly of a certain college at Oxford, and lately deacon and curate of a church in a certain great town. It was ascertained by a reporter who interviewed the pew-opener that he was a good preacher—fluent, eloquent, and a compeller of tears; it was also ascertained that he was a poet, and had won the Newdigate, but was in no other way distinguished during his University career. Whispers there were—but there are whispers about all good and promising young men. The pew-opener was of opinion that people were jealous, and jealous people, we know, will say anything. Meantime, nobody had ever seen a more lovely young deacon or a more ideal young priest, and, as was said above, sad were the hearts of those pious virgins who were in the church and saw this Christian Apollo thus brought to a signal and an open shame. What had he done? What was that impediment?

CHAPTER II

AT THE CLUB

Two men sat in a smoking-room of the Craftsman Club. Their names matter little, but they were called Homerton Smith and Euston Jones. It was in the evening and at a time—between nine and ten—when the room is not generally crowded. It is the largest and by far the pleasantest room in the whole house, formerly the drawing-room when old Lady Lockworthy lived here and gave her parties. There were only two or three groups of men in the room. The two with whom we are concerned were both young—not more than five or six and twenty—they had been dining together; they had been talking on all possible topics for two hours and were now sitting in silence—a thing which proved old friendship. Men who are merely acquaintance force the talk; men who are strangers chatter continually; old friends sit sometimes—more often than not—in silence. In this way they lean upon each other, take counsel together, and lay their burdens upon each other. No need to talk when we know already. No need to ask when we know beforehand what will be the reply.

One of them—it was Homerton Smith—took up an evening paper and carelessly turned over the pages.

Suddenly he cried out, 'Good heavens! Euston, you remember the man Leighan, of your year—the year above me—interesting man—poet—dreamer—musical man?'

'To be sure I remember the man, Paul Leighan,' replied his friend Euston Jones coldly—he was a man with whom nature had dealt rather hardly, giving him a short and squat figure, a snub nose, and an insignificant appearance. I would explain insignificance if I could, but it is beyond me; size has little or nothing to do with it; the most insignificant-looking person I ever saw was a giant; this man was short and yet he was insignificant of aspect. 'I remember the man Leighan very well indeed,' he replied. 'I have reason to remember the man Leighan all the days of my life. If you come to that, I have no objection to say daily and to pray nightly, if it would do any good—damn the man Leighan!'

'Well, I don't know why you bear such a grudge against the man Leighan—as you call him; but, in fact, your prayer seems to have been already answered.'

'Ah!'—the man removed the pipe from his lips and inhaled a deep breath of satisfaction. 'You mean that he is actually sus-per-coll? That is, to be sure, only what might have been expected. But I hardly expected the event to happen quite so soon.'

'He is not hanged yet; though I shouldn't wonder if it would be better for him had the thing led to hanging. Listen, old man.' He proceeded to read the paragraph from the evening paper narrating the extraordinary incident at Avonminster Cathedral.

'Fine situation,' said the other; he was a journalist just beginning, with dreams of the drama—highest

and noblest kind of play—and of fiction, epic fiction, grand fiction, elemental fiction, truly human fiction; and of poetry, grand poetry, epoch-making. 'Very fine situation indeed. Our friend, the man called Leighan, would no doubt enjoy it. Other men would find it shameful.'

'The paper says that he took off his surplice and hurled himself face downwards on the steps in an agony of self-abasement.'

'Something of the same sort in *Hypatia*, isn't there? I have already seen the man called Leighan in an agony of self-abasement. He enjoyed it prodigiously; he rolled and revelled in the emotion of self-abasement and self-reproach. I wonder who the woman was—*cherchez la femme* especially with Phœbus Apollo Leighan; I wonder what he has done. If he were here he would tell us frankly with another most enjoyable agony of self-abasement.'

Said the other man, 'What do you mean by repeating about Leighan and self-abasement? Because I myself—but come, tell me your story and I will tell you mine.'

'I look such a beastly fool in my story that I am ashamed——'

'So do I. Fool isn't the word for my folly.'

'In that case, and since there is nobody here to listen,—mind, you must never, never, never communicate the story to anyone, not even if we quarrel. Very well. Now you shall hear a story of a monstrous ass. First of all, Leighan used to tell us, as you remember, that he was an orphan, son of a Ceylon planter, and that he had neither cousins nor friends. A most interesting story he made up how he was left the only child

of his parents, alone among strangers ; how he was brought up by strangers, and sent over here to school ; how his guardians wasted his substance ; how he was left with no more than enough to carry him through to the time of ordination ; how he was resolved from childhood to devote himself to the Church — aspirations, poetry, music, æsthetics, all the rest of it, you know.'

' Yes—I remember. Used to account for his dark hair and pale face by his birth in the tropics.'

' Well. His name is not Paul Cannington Leighan at all ; not even Paul : it is Samuel Canning—Sam, or Sammy, he answered to either name—Sam Canning, the only child of his mother, and she was a widow. The father died when he was an infant, and the widow kept on the business still—bookseller and stationer in Eastchester. The boy had a lovely face and a lovely voice ; they took him into the choir, and he used to sing solos with so much fervour—such spiritual rapture—in his angelic countenance, that all the ladies fell in love with him. He was educated at the Grammar School. The masters, however, were not so fond of him as the ladies who attended the Cathedral service ; and that was not remarkable : because, you see, Sammy had his little weaknesses. He was not clever, and he cribbed his exercises ; he was not brave, and he told lies with the greatest readiness ; he had no sense of honour, and used to sneak wherever he could. The boys, like the masters, hated him ; he was too dainty for the playing field ; he made up little malignant fictions about the fellows and spread them abroad. He stayed at the school, however, till he was eighteen ; then something happened—all this I heard from a man who is now a

master there. I do not know what the something was, but it was something unpleasant, for the Head sent for him one morning, and in five minutes he was fired out of the front door. The Head still says about him that for the first and only time in his life he came across a human creature apparently without a soul—without a soul he said—queer thing to say about a boy—eh ?'

'Very queer.'

'Then Master Sammy disappeared. Two or three years later news came to his native town that he had changed his name and was at Oxford. It isn't often that an Eastchester boy goes to Oxford; they all go to Cambridge. I suppose Sammy thought no one would find him out. But his face is far too lovely and his piety is far too ostentatious. Other men kneel in church: he flops and flings and sprawls. Other men bow their heads in obscurity, he turns up his face under the strongest light in the place. There was, however, one Eastchester man at Oxford, and of course he spotted Sam. He seems to have reported the matter at home and to have said nothing at Oxford. Perhaps Sammy entreated him with tears to observe silence. However that may be, the man shortly afterwards went down, and Sam with his romantic story remained unchallenged.'

'He must have presented a false baptism certificate, however.'

'He was equal to so simple a thing. I have myself seen the college register—though at the time I did not know it was false. He is entered as born in the Island of Ceylon—*filius Edwardi Cannington Leighan generosi et armigeri*, son of a gentleman, a coffee planter—I forget for the moment the Latin for

coffee planter, and the Island of Ceylon—Trapobane, is it? So that he must, as you say, have brought with him a false baptism certificate, or he must have told that lie and got it accepted without proof.'

'Go on. Your story, please.'

'His mother, I suppose, found money for him. He always seemed to have plenty. She died two or three years ago, and I know not what idea she had of her son's real character. So much for prelude. Now for my story. You know—or you don't know—that I have always, ever since I could write, been trying my hand at verses——'

'Your recent productions enable me to understand so much, though I must say——'

'Just so. Four years ago I wrote a poem for the Newdigate—you know there is a rule that no poem will be received if it is in the candidate's writing. So when it was finished I took it to Leighan—I was very chummy with him at the time; we used to read Shelley together, and Byron—he was very fond of certain bits in *Don Juan* in spite of his spirituality—so I took the thing, I say, to Leighan, and asked him to copy it for me.'

'Good Heavens!' The other man started in his chair. 'You don't positively mean—Why—he won the Newdigate!'

'You shall hear. He undertook to copy it out for me; he made a beautiful copy; he can write as beautifully as he can sing; we agreed upon a motto, and he undertook to send it in.'

'Oh!' the other man gasped. 'It cannot be. Why, he brought me his poem clearly written out and begged me to copy it for him under distinct promise of secrecy—and I did it, and it won the prize.'

‘It won the prize. That is true. He was the first man who brought me the news. And it was with my poem—my poem—mine—mine—damn him!’ The poet warmed with the recital of his wrongs.

‘With your poem? Wonderful! And you sat down in patience and endured it.’

‘He came to me overwhelmed with shame; he threw himself at my feet; he knelt, he prayed; he wrung his hands; he said this and he said that; he declared that he was ruined for life unless I would forgive him and keep silence. He said that he was poor and friendless; that his only chance was to distinguish himself; that the prize would be of the greatest possible use to him; that if I exposed him he would be expelled; his whole career would be blasted.’

‘Yes—so it would, doubtless.’

‘And then he pointed out that if I charged him with the fact he should be obliged to defend himself tooth and nail. No one, he said, would believe that I was a poet; whereas everybody knew that he professed to be a lover of verse, at least. And now he had in his desk the scraps and bits of the poem in his own handwriting while I had nothing. I had not, in fact—I suppose he had stolen them all from my desk—I had not a scrap of evidence—nothing but my bare word—well, you know the rest. I gave in, and he recited splendidly what was called a noble poem, in a most musical voice, and with a most eloquent delivery, before the Princess of Wales herself. Oh! it was magnificent. I stood in the gallery and enjoyed it. He looked every inch a poet. Everybody said so. Do I look like a poet?’

‘That is even a finer story than mine,’ said the

other man. 'I will tell it, however, under the same seal of secrecy. I had almost forgotten the thing; in fact, I had almost forgotten the man. As for his story—the romance of Ceylon—I knew nothing—or little—about it. Well, this is what happened. You remember, perhaps, that there was a good deal of unpleasantness one term about things disappearing in the college—clocks, watches, rings, money, all kinds of things. Yes . . . and nothing ever found out, was there? Well, one day I came up from the river and found that my watch and chain, my purse, which had in it a five-pound note and some gold, two or three rings, and other odds and ends, were gone. I said nothing at all, because talking about the loss would probably do more harm than good; but I cast about quietly, and I had down a detective and we talked over the matter. The watch was found to have been pawned by one person, the rings by another, and the note had been presented by Leighan himself, whose acquaintance with those other two persons was clearly proved.'

'Then you should have gone straight to the tutor.'

'So should you, old man. But you didn't—and I didn't. Why? I weakly went to the man's rooms accompanied by the detective, and I told him what had been discovered. Just as in your case, he gave way at once, he confessed the whole thing; only he swore that he had had nothing—nothing whatever—to do with other robberies; this was the first—the only time he had been tempted; he had fallen. Oh! he told me the most terrible tale of grinding poverty and of—of everything. If I did not forgive him he should be ruined; his life would be blasted; he would be a cast-away. He wept, he knelt, he threw himself on the

floor. I wept, too : I was greatly distressed ; I swore that nothing should be said ; the whole business should be buried and forgotten. I dismissed the detective, who sniffed and grinned and used contemptuous language about tears and repentance ; and then, in order to prevent him from falling into temptation again for a time, I gave him a check for thirty pounds—I had plenty of money, you know. He had a way with him—what was it ? a clever, engaging way—he did what he liked with everybody.’

‘I really should not like to say which was the weaker of the two—you or I.’

‘It was just before he fell ill. They said it was too rigid fasting in Lent. I, with my knowledge of that gnawing worm, his conscience, thought his illness was caused by excessive self-reproach.’

‘Devil a gnaw in that worm, if you please. Yet it is a worm of a conscience—a wriggling, boneless, nerveless worm. Well, that is our saintly Paul, otherwise Sammy. So he took his degree when the rest of us did, and he went down. Last year I heard that he was a curate in some church or other ; that he was working himself to death, and preaching with extraordinary eloquence. I went to hear him. By this time I had ceased to believe in his penitence over the Newdigate job, because, you see, I had heard something about his early history. The man who could make up such a yarn about his early history was quite capable of that Newdigate trick. However, I went to the church. I found the make-up admirable ; the pale cheeks perhaps a little touched, as actors understand, in order to bring out their pallor ; the eyes large and bright, perhaps artificially,

to make them bigger and more luminous; white hands, figure tall, voice musical and full, though of high pitch. He preached a discourse that did not move me a bit. But it seemed to fetch the women. And that is all that I know about him.'

'I wonder what he has done now?'

'I wonder. Something very disgraceful indeed, no doubt. Well, if he were here he would tell us himself, as I said before, in a most enjoyable agony of self-abasement.'

Just then the waiter brought up a card.

'Here's a wonderful coincidence!' cried the man to whom it was brought. 'Here is the very man himself! Actually arrived at this very moment! Let's have him up—now we shall see.'

The Rev. Paul Cannington Leighan entered the room. He came in with lofty brow, calm, self-possessed. The two men rose with a little hesitation, then accepted his hand with a forced smile, and glanced guiltily at each other.

'You are suspicious,' said the young clergyman, smiling sweetly if sadly. 'Your looks are cold—you hesitate to take my hand. Well, I must not complain; and, indeed, I am not surprised after the paragraph which has gone the round of all the papers.'

'Quite so'—Mr. Euston Smith turned a hard face upon the deacon; 'there is every reason for coldness or suspicion, or anything you please. In fact we were talking about it when your card was sent up.'

'I daresay. Well, you don't want a long explanation. The person who placed the paper in the Arch-deacon's hands did it, I hope and believe, for the best.

She knew that a certain charge was going to be preferred against me that very day.'

'A certain charge—of what character?'

'A certain charge. Never mind of what character. If it concerned myself I would tell you at once the nature of that charge. But the wretched thing no longer concerns me. It concerns others now—not myself. I have shaken it off with the greatest ease; still, I confess that had I known that the charge was impending I should certainly not have presented myself. As it was, the warning proved fortunate, because it has given me time to clear myself absolutely. Here is a letter from the Bishop's chaplain, which, you see, completely clears away the charge.' He took out a pocket-book and produced a note from the Palace signed by the chaplain, to the effect that the Bishop was perfectly satisfied by the confession, duly signed and witnessed, of the criminal sent to him by the vicar of his parish; that he himself, the Rev. Paul Leighan, was clearly innocent in the matter; and that he, the Bishop, was ready to ordain him, the Rev. Paul Leighan, priest, at a special service. The chaplain added a few words from the Archdeacon, and a line or two of regret from himself, that this untoward event had happened to the temporary annoyance—and worse than annoyance—of an innocent man. 'The trouble was chiefly,' Mr. Leighan continued, 'that I had to go home at once in order to see my own vicar, and to set at rest his mind and the minds of certain good people who believe in my . . . endeavours . . . after the Christian life . . . and were horribly scandalised at what had happened. There will be a satisfactory paragraph in to-morrow's paper.'

The matter has caused me a great deal of distress, I must confess—unmerited suffering, one would say; but with the memory of sins—of early sins—’ he looked from one to the other as if meekly reminding one of the poem and the other of the purse—‘early sins—still bleeding—freshly bleeding—in the heart—no suffering,’ he concluded, ‘is too great—no retribution too heavy for these early sins—none—none!’ He dropped his head for a moment.

The man who had not won the Newdigate sniffed, but not with emotion. Then he got up and went away with the coldest salutation possible.

When the two men were left together, Leighan recovered his spirits; he even laughed and joked; he was persuaded to take a cigarette and a drink; the old charm returned to him; the gentle, feminine, winning manner; the sympathetic voice; the little innocent insinuations; touches of the pristine fervour. The other man quite forgot the episode of the watch and the purse; he abandoned himself to the magic and mesmerism of his former friend; and when Leighan departed at twelve o’clock it was with a cheque for 50*l.* in his pocket.

But there was no explanatory paragraph in next day’s paper. On the contrary, there was a statement that the Rev. Paul Leighan’s curacy was vacant. No one, however, knew what was the crime or what was the impediment; nor did any one know who was the mysterious lady of the black veil and the folded paper.

A fortnight later the two club men met again.

‘I say,’ said the baffled poet, ‘about our friend Sammy, you know—Sammy Canning, *alias* Paul the

Deacon. The chaplain's letter was a forgery. I found a man who knows the Bishop's chaplain. He never wrote any letter at all. There has been no confession sent up by the Vicar. It was a deliberate lie and forgery to get—what?—money, perhaps, out of you. Did he get money? I thought so. Well, it's all up with him. The man's character is ruined. I am told that the story is not going to be a case for the courts, but it's a case quite good enough to finish him. He's done for. I thought so when he made those pious remarks about unmerited suffering and early sins. Oh! Paul Phœbus Apollo Samuel Cannington Canning Leighan—Paul the Poet—Paul the Deacon—*what* a humbug you are!'

CHAPTER III

BROKEN TO PIECES

A GIRL stood before the fire in the little drawing-room of a little London flat. It was afternoon—an afternoon in May, but there was as yet no warmth of spring in the London air, and the fire was burning as merrily as in January. The room was prettily and artistically furnished; it was bright with hangings, pictures, and flowers; a side-table was covered with books; there was a revolving bookcase; through the open door was caught a glimpse of another room, where were shelves laden with books. This was the dining-room. Margaret Cholmeley was a girl with a ‘certain amount’ of money. Everybody knows the girl with a ‘certain amount’ of money who is not in a hurry to be married and follows her own life in her own way. She was a girl without parents; her brothers were married; she was emancipated enough to desire personal freedom; she had it, with a latch-key, and an old servant to look after a young servant in this flat of six or seven rooms. It is an ideal life for those who like perfect freedom and do not mind occasional loneliness, and have friends, occupations, and plenty to think about. Margaret had all these requisites for life in chambers. Above all, she had plenty to think about.

She was a serious girl; the lines of her face were set for serious purpose; she looked also a resolute girl, and she appeared to be a clear-headed girl. The regular, clear-cut features and the steady grey eyes showed so much. A girl whom some men would call beautiful and most men would call cold; a girl whom women would call not pretty—‘certainly not pretty’—but good-looking; not what is called a man’s woman, engaging, winning, and eager to please; nor, on the other hand, quite a woman’s woman. This afternoon she was in great trouble. She gazed into the red coals and found in them no solace or suggestion of consolation; she twisted a piece of notepaper in her fingers in uncertainty. The note contained only the simple words: ‘I will call to-morrow. Paul.’

The note was from the man who had ruined and wrecked her life, though nobody knew it except herself; the man whom she loved; the man of whom she thought continually; the man whose character she had learned at last by the terrible process of seeing stripped off, one by one, every single attribute which had once made him, in her eyes, heroic, saintly, and nigh unto the gates of heaven.

And she was the lady in the black veil with the folded paper. Yes, she had done that. She had brought him to an open shame.

‘I will not see him,’ she murmured. ‘It is an outrage that he should even attempt to see me. He is publicly, openly disgraced—and by me. He can never again lift up his head—and I have done it—I who was going to be his guardian angel! He will think, I suppose, that the act was one of feminine jealousy and spite. As if I was not above that!’

But to call upon me—to come here—here—after what he has done! Oh! it is incredible! Oh! what a miserable woman I am that I should ever have loved such a man! I will tell Esther—he shall not be admitted—he shall never come to the place again—never—never—nev——’ As she lifted her hand to ring the bell there was a loud and cheerful knocking at the door.

She dropped her hand; she turned pale; she sank into a chair. She heard her servant Esther’s feet along the narrow hall; she heard the opening of the door and the entrance of a manly step. ‘It is the last time,’ she said. ‘It is the very last time that I will see him,’ and so yielded and gave way.

Her caller—the young gentleman named Paul Leighan—stood in the doorway for a moment hesitating. He was beautifully dressed in clericals, and looked almost as holy as he had been two days before at the Cathedral. Then he stepped in, shut the door gently, and sank into a chair by the fire, where he lay back, his elbows on the arms, his fingers touching, with a smile—not the sweet sad smile of a penitent, but a cheerful smile. Not a touch of shame, or repentance, or sorrow—a cheerful, happy smile.

‘How can you come here?’ she asked, springing to her feet and tapping the floor with her foot. ‘How dare you come here? How dare you?’

‘You have said something like that several times before, Maggie, remember. Yet you have forgiven me.’

‘Oh! he has done—done this—and that—and everything!’ She clasped her hands, swinging herself to and fro. ‘Oh! he is covered with shame; his dis-

graceful name is in all the papers ; his career is ruined ; he can never recover ; and he dares to come here as if nothing serious had happened ! ’

‘Calm yourself, Maggie. Remember that I have got into troublesome scrapes more than once before and have come out of them without much difficulty. This time things do look a little foggy. Patience, however. The clouds will roll by—the mist will lift. Still, I did think, Maggie—oh ! I am not going to reproach you—but I did think when I saw you marching up to the Archdeacon with your bit of paper in your hand, that Nemesis might have come in another shape. It did look like an ill-timed visit to the interesting Cathedral—that is all. Otherwise, you did, no doubt, the right thing in stopping the ordination—a dramatic thing too.’

‘Ill-chosen time ? ’ she repeated. ‘In another five minutes you would have been an ordained priest of the Church and with *that* behind you.’

‘My dear Maggie, it doesn’t matter the least in the world what is behind a man. There would have been a good deal more than *that*, as you call it. There would have been *those* ’—he folded his hands and laughed pleasantly. ‘*Those*, Maggie. Some of them you know. Some of them you don’t know. Now tell me, Maggie, my friend Maggie ’—she began to feel the old magic of his voice : she was afraid to look at him on account of the magic of his eyes—‘how you came—you—you—my guardian angel, my better half, my Beatrice—you—to be the messenger of evil ? ’

‘Had it not been for me you would have been arrested on coming out of the Cathedral, a newly made

priest, and taken before a magistrate on the charge of forgery, with another charge—not criminal, yet it should be—as the motive. I brought one kind of disgrace upon you in order to save you—and the Church—from another and a worse kind of scandal.’

‘Oh! Really! Now this was vindictive. Only a little twenty-pound thing, too. Was it really so arranged?’

‘Yes. I was only able to stop it at the last moment by promising to declare an impediment in the open Cathedral. Better that than a prison. Remember, Paul, if you are capable of feeling any shame at all, that you were as near a prison as any man ever was—and as near a just sentence of penal servitude.’

‘It is like an escape on a glacier, isn’t it? Gives one a thrill just to remember it. On the edge of a precipice. Might have gone over it. It is a thing to reflect upon with a pleasurable sensation. All emotions are pleasurable if they are received in the proper spirit. So the Vicar took the money and gave up his revenge, did he?’

‘Here is the dreadful thing. You had better destroy it at once.’ She threw him a paper which fell fluttering at his feet. It looked like a cheque.

‘Not at once. I like to be reminded of things sometimes—perils and dangers of the deep.’ He looked at the paper with interest and even admiration: then he pulled out his pocket-book and placed it carefully in the pocket. ‘The Vicar was very vindictive to exact that condition—very vindictive. You said something, Maggie, about—about another

charge.' He turned his face and looked into the fire. 'What has become of—of the other charge?'

'The other "charge"—as you call her—has run away from home. Perhaps in order to be with you.'

'With me? Oh! dear me—I assure you not. You may rest quite assured, Maggie, that she is not with me. I don't want her. I don't want to know what becomes of her. She had better—ah!—repent and go home again. The incident is closed—I wish it closed—and forgotten. My address for the moment will be best kept a secret. I think, however, that it was extremely sensible—thoughtful even, and considerate beyond what is generally found in such cases—for that person to go clear out of the way. I trust that person will keep out of the way altogether. It smooths so many difficulties, you see, when one of two parties keeps out of the way. I am very glad, Maggie, that you did not interfere with that other party. It might have pained and distressed you. I am glad that you have been spared. Some of our too tender and sensitive sisters allow themselves to be excessively pained—needlessly pained—by assuming that other persons share their own ideas.'

'Paul, is it impossible—quite impossible—to awaken anything like conscience in you?'

'I like to be quite open with you, my dear Maggie, because you are certainly the best friend—just for the moment even the only friend—that I have. And therefore I venture to reply that I do not think anything would give me what you call a conscience. What is your conscience? Something that objects to your having what you want, and doing what you would

like to do. It is inconvenient. Look at me, for instance. I wanted money a week or two ago. I very often want money. Another man had got, I found out, money in the bank. So I borrowed some of it. He would not have lent me the money for the asking, so I put his name on a bit of paper and got what I needed out of the bank. Most foolishly I went openly and in person to cash that cheque, and I was known to the pay clerk, who sings in our choir, so that it would have been useless to deny possession of the cheque, and I know of no one whom I could charge with giving me the cheque. It was a foolish, hasty, bungling job, I admit. Then you appeal to my conscience. You ask me why I am not pricked by conscience. You say there is a commandment, and that it is broken, and I suppose it is; but somehow I am not very sorry about it. Yet I am sorry that you should have had so much trouble about it, Maggie. Believe me, I am very sorry to cause you—you—any distress.'

'Oh!' She shook her shoulders with impatience.

'When one is young—I am still young—life is full of the most lovely things. I want them all—I have a right to them all, if I can get them. They are all for the young men, and I am always most unfeignedly sorry to find myself in want of things that can only be got by these little breaches of law. Old men ought not to have anything at all. Girls don't want these things; women don't want them: they are young men's things. I long for them—I can't tell you how much I long for them all. I want love, feasting, wine, singing, music, art, dancing, beautiful girls, fine rooms, and rich raiment—everything that

the wit of man creates and the brain of man desires. And, oh, how little I get—how moderate I am!’ He was sitting up and leaning forward, looking up at her face, but she still turned away and would not meet his eyes. ‘I have always,’ he went on, ‘been hungry for those things. If I can get them in any way—in any way, mind—I will. What? These are the things for which we were born. Let each generation drink its full measure, running over, of those joys, before it goes away and is no more seen. You blame a man for wanting them? Why, we are like the wild creatures: we hunger and fight for these good things. They are the necessary food of youth. Your conscience, that you talk about so much, would not suffer me to fight for what I want, and so I should have to go hungry and empty. Don’t worry me about a conscience.’

‘And you are a clergyman!’

‘I was. Whether I shall be again is doubtful. You have made it, perhaps, impossible.’

‘You are a Christian at least. You go to church?’

‘I go to church. I have always been to church. Nobody has ever been to church more than I have. I am very fond of the church. Its chants, its anthems, and its hymns I love. When I took orders it was in order to go on going to church. My greatest happiness has always been in church. As a boy I used to turn up my fine eyes and put a fine spiritual rapture into my face, which made the women sigh and cry. The sight of that face, the sweetness of those eyes, they said, was alone sufficient to uplift their hearts and to fill them with faith.’

‘It was a fatal gift.’

‘They used to load me with presents. They used

to get me to their houses and make me sing. They gave me kisses and money and books, and all kinds of jolly things. And I liked their kisses best. Then they had my photograph taken, and it was sold in the shops—even in London they sold it—the boy in the surplice with his mouth open and his eyes gazing upwards, filled with a light not of this world.'

'How could they? How could your mother let them do it?'

'She was proud of it. Sometimes she thought it well to put in a word about having one's head turned, but it was in a faint-hearted way. On the whole she was proud of all the flattery. She used to come to the Cathedral herself and sit opposite. She used to tattle to her customers in the shop about her saintly boy. She had many of his sayings to relate. She really believed that her son was a saint. I believed it too. She used to expect an audible call like that of Samuel. She would not have been in the least surprised at the appearance of miracles. Indeed, I did think of trying one or two. Unfortunately I had not then so much courage as I have acquired since. Otherwise I might have risen to fame very early.'

'Again—a fatal gift,' said the girl.

'Why, Maggie, you would not like the man you love to be a sandy-haired, pimply little wretch, with boiled fish eyes and snub nose and five-foot-nothing high, would you?'

'Go on—go on. Let us finish.'

'Here is my *apologia*, Maggie. I don't think you quite understand the kind of early life I had. Well, you see, it was all very well at home and in the Cathedral, but at school it was different. The boys—they

were a rough, coarse set, who had no saintliness of soul and were capable of no sentiment—wouldn't have my gifts and graces at any price. They gave me nick-names. I was Soapy Sam. You know that my first name was actually Samuel—Samuel—till I changed it. I was Saint Snivel—I was Holy Joe—I was the Pious Warbler—all kinds of names. I was not happy at school. Then I couldn't fight, and they wouldn't let me cry. Even the headmaster wouldn't have it when I began to put on anything like the real spiritual gaze of the photograph. Called me a miserable little hypocrite once when I was saying a collect, and began to put a little expression into my eyes. Shied the book at me—the Book of Common Prayer. And he a clergyman! No, I was not happy at school,' he added thoughtfully. 'It was there that the first row happened.'

'What was that?' Despite her wrath she could not choose but listen; besides, he had never before this revealed himself so completely.

'Something about money,' he replied with a weary sigh. 'It is always about money. We can't get along without money, yet they make so much fuss about helping yourself. This fuss was only about three or four pounds; I found them on the mantel-shelf in one of the masters' rooms; of course I didn't ask if it belonged to anybody. You pick a blackberry on the hedge and you don't ask whose blackberry it is. There was a maidservant who saw me. Of course, in self-defence, I said that I saw her take the money. They searched me and they found the coins in my pocket. So I was expelled, and all the boys came out to cheer when Holy Joe left the doors. Of

course, at home I stuck to the story about the housemaid. And the ladies all believed it.'

'Oh! what a story it is!'

'So I left home and went to London. My voice was coming back now in the shape of a tenor. And I began to sing about, under another name—and made your acquaintance, Maggie.' He tried to take her hand, but she drew it away.

'Made your acquaintance, Maggie,' he repeated. 'It was the happiest day in my life. You fell in love with me and I with you on the first day.'

'You with me—you in love with anybody?'

'I with you. When I am in trouble, where do I turn? Here. To whom do I make confession? To you. Do I ever hide anything from you? Never, Maggie—my soul is laid bare to you—a pure and candid soul.'

'Pure? Candid? You lay bare to me a pool, a sink, an ocean of corruption, and you call it a pure and candid soul!'

'Not corruption. Anything but that, Maggie. You mistake. A healthy, natural soul, free from common prejudice, free from a meddlesome conscience——'

'Oh! He has been brought up in the very bosom of the Church and he talks about prejudice!'

'Perhaps had I not been brought up quite so much in that bosom I should have been different. It was in consequence of that bosom that I became what I did become. When words are repeated by a boy every day, and thousands of times, they may become to that boy nothing but words. They haven't discovered that yet. When you simulate or stimulate

emotion you think of nothing but the emotion; the reason or foundation of it ceases to exist. Maggie, if I had been brought up like any other boy I should now be like any other man. You lament over me because I do things which seem to you dreadful. Nothing is dreadful to me in that way. Want alone is dreadful to me; desire is necessity—desire is my only law. Make me, if you can, obey some other law. Every man is a solitary unit; he lives for himself, he has to get what he can for himself. Oh! I could tell you things—if you care to hear them——’

‘Go on,’ she replied. ‘Show me all.’

‘No, no.’ He had suddenly become earnest and real. He went back to his old mocking tone. ‘I have told you enough. The wicked man is interesting because he may turn away from his wickedness. You might yourself be the instrument of his repentance. But the actual separate acts of the wicked man are not attractive to you and such as you. Curious! It is only the masculine mind which delights in reading about wicked men. I am, vaguely speaking, and without further details, the wicked man.’

‘Unfortunately, I know so many of the details.’

‘Yes; but I am interesting still. Look at me, Maggie.’ He stood up and again tried to take her hand, but she turned away. ‘You are afraid. You know that I am interesting still,’ he laughed, musically. ‘You dare not meet my eyes. Well, Maggie, whatever I am accused of doing you know that my heart is here. Nobody knows the true man—the real man—except yourself.’

‘Nobody could guess that such a man exists.’

‘I remember, Maggie’—he seated himself at the

piano, and running his fingers lightly over the keys as an accompaniment to his words, suggesting now a bit of Schubert and now a bit of Mendelssohn—‘I remember very well the day and place where I first spoke to you about myself.’

‘It was the first day we met.’

‘Was it so soon? Very likely. I always begin with girls by talking about myself. They like it.’

His fingers rambled about the keys.

As the girl leaned her head sadly on her hand and gazed into the fire, while the music fell upon her ears, she saw a vision—it took only a minute or two, but it covered five years. She saw this man, young and beautiful as a dream, more ethereal than any marvel or miracle in Art; whose eyes were like shaded fountains in whose waters lay life for the soul; whose voice was soft with the music of heavenly harmonies; whose heart was filled with faith; who prayed for nothing but to be in the Church, always in the Church—always in the service of the Church—to consecrate himself—all his precious gifts—his life, his all, to the service of the Church. And he was poor—and she was rich. Then in her vision she saw how she went to her guardian and implored him to give the young man enough for his purpose—out of her money—she could well spare it. The young man found out who gave the money; he came to thank her; he was moved to tears; he could never thank her enough; he could find no words. And after that she seemed to belong to him. At first she was filled with happiness; no girl ever had a lover so divine; he was her idol.

Little by little—in her vision—she saw how the

idol was gradually broken to pieces. First, there were the little rifts in the perfect armour of righteousness—the discrepancy between words and deeds—the undisguised pursuit of the world, and her two famous companions, side by side with quite contrary professions and aspirations; the troubles, discoveries, and confessions—until the saint was all gone and there was left, instead, a creature, to whom sin and crime and shame were words and nothing but words, just as righteousness and faith were also words and nothing but words.

She saw him in the vision, a satyr, a Caliban, a mocking spirit; a spirit not incredulous, but absolutely incapable of belief in higher things. Yet she saw herself following him, tied to him, constrained to be with him; always trying to awaken his conscience, always baffled, always beaten back.

‘You cannot say, Maggie,’ the man went on, still at the piano, ‘that I told you anything but the truth. It is always a comfort to me to think that I have someone who will bear the truth from me.’

‘You told me you were unhappy because your heart—your whole heart—was in the Church, and you were kept out of it. You said that if you could not be in the Church as a priest, you would be in it as a tenor in the choir—and if that was impossible as a verger.’

‘Yes. I told you all that. It was, and it is, quite true. I am never truly happy, I believe, except at the Church services. They are a part of me.’ He touched the keys again to something suggestive of part of a service. ‘I wish I had been a Roman Catholic. The beautiful long service with all its

singing, would have pleased me even more than our own. Yes, I ought to have been a Roman Catholic priest. I was born to be a Roman Catholic priest. I told you the truth, Maggie. For me to be singing at concerts—to be wasting a noble voice in sentimental songs when I might be singing an anthem in a cathedral—I was thrown away, Maggie.'

'You told me so certainly.'

'Then you gave me money for Oxford. That led me back to the Church. I found all the old emotions returning to me just as easily and pleasantly as before. At the University there is fine scope for a man like me, and I made many friends.'

'Who threw you over when they found you out.'

'My friends leave me from time to time,' he replied lightly; 'but others come.'

'And now you have turned yourself out of the Church by your own act and deed.'

'I am not so sure. I have never been in quite such a scrape before, it is true. Still, man is full of resource, particularly a man who is not troubled with laws forbidding this and that. We shall see, Maggie.'

He played on, without speaking, for about ten minutes. Then he closed the piano and got up.

'I suppose I must leave you,' he said. 'You will give me one kind word before I go. You will wish me good luck. I shall need all the good luck I can get if I am to get back into the Church.'

'Oh! Paul, I cannot. You break my heart. I must abandon you. This last business is too dreadful. You must never come here any more. Go—go and visit—that other person.'

'I wrote a letter to the Vicar,' he said. 'I told

him that scandals are always caused by the second party, you know—the other person ; not by the man who did the thing. About his own little grievance—that little twenty-pound job—I told him I was ready to send him the money ; I got it, in fact, from an old friend—one of the friends who threw me over, you know. I said I was very sorry it had happened, but I wanted the money ; and that being so, why, I wrote this, not knowing that you had settled the business. So I suppose that is done with. As for the other matter——’

‘ Yes ’—her cheek flamed—‘ the other matter ? ’

He only laughed.

‘ It will settle itself,’ he said. ‘ When I was a boy they ran after me and kissed me. Maggie, they have done it ever since. They have been after me just as much. They work slippers and braces for me ; they give me books ; oh ! there won’t be any more scandal. It is only a thousand pities that the thing came out just when it did. However, I don’t despair. Repentance—open repentance—always wins the day. You heard, perhaps, of the way in which I left the Cathedral ? Perhaps you saw it ; I read it in the papers—that it was really fine, and touched all hearts.’

‘ Oh ! If you had a heart to be touched ! ’

‘ I once had a heart, but it is now yours, Maggie. You have had it for five years—ever since you were a sweet, blushing, innocent, open-eyed darling of seventeen.’

She kept her face averted, but she blushed and she dropped her head. The soft music of his voice touched her still, and as much as ever.

‘Stand up—stand up I say,’ he spoke in a voice of command. She obeyed and stood beside him. ‘Give me your hand.’ Again she obeyed. ‘Look in my face.’ She raised her eyes. She was conquered. He stooped and kissed her lips. His eyes were full of love—was it real or was it simulated? Then he laughed—the laugh of one who wins. ‘What do I care,’ he said, ‘whether they turn me out or not, provided I have my Maggie? My dear’—there was a mirror in the overmantel—‘we shall make a lovely pair when we are married.’

She tore herself away from him. ‘Married? No—not that, Paul. Never—never—not that! Oh! I am degraded by suffering you to remain in my presence. I am more degraded still by letting you speak to me of love—you—a man such as once I thought impossible—oh! what words can I find? What can I say?’

‘Why, Maggie, you can say the truth. You can say that you love me.’

‘Yes, I love you, as you should be—as God meant you to be. Not what you are. Go! Don’t speak to me of love again till the words, the sacred words with which you have sported, mean things—the meaningless, idle words, the pretences and the shams, become real and living things—till you find your soul and your Judge, and, perhaps, your Redeemer. Go, I say!’

He laughed—caught her hand—kissed it.

‘Farewell, my Maggie,’ he said lightly, and left the room.

CHAPTER IV

THE DOWNWARD WAY

WHEN Paul found himself in the street, he walked away with a self-satisfied look on his face and a smile on his lips. There had been moments since that time in the Cathedral when he felt some anxiety about his relations with the girl who reproached him continually, yet never quite threw him over. It was all right ; she loved him. It is always satisfactory for a penniless adventurer to feel that he is actually loved by a girl of independent fortune ; and this without respect to his morals or his principles or his practice. As for marrying her, he had no desire at all to marry her. Marriage with such a girl would be like always being in school, but he could still, he thought, borrow money from her. The present condition of things was far more satisfactory. These reflections, coupled with a natural buoyancy of disposition, enabled Paul to keep up his courage, even at this dark moment, when the evening papers had the little incident in their bills, and all the world was talking about it and many ready writers were inventing stories concerning the cause of that incident. He went home to his lodgings—he had taken two rooms in a first floor near Russell Square. First, he took off his clerical garb ; coat and waistcoat

and collar he laid aside with something like a groan. 'When,' he asked, 'shall I wear these things again?' He thought of the saintly figure clad in white and the upturned eyes and the hands folded in prayer or extended in exhortation, and he sighed a deep and heartfelt sigh. 'The vindictiveness of that vicar!' he said. 'Where is charity? Where forgiveness?'

He put on a short black jacket and a black tie, so that he now looked like only half a cleric, because no disguise could possibly take from his face the look which belonged to none other than one of the cloth. Every profession has its typical face: you may, for instance, construct the typical barrister by photographing one upon the other all the faces in all the wigs in all the courts, but it is seldom that you find any one man possessed of the typical face. So with the young clergyman: it is seldom, indeed, that you find in one man the typical clerical face. But Paul had it.

This change effected, he spread out blotting-pad and paper.

'Repentance,' said Paul the Deacon, 'opens all doors.' I shall make haste to repent.'

He sat down, therefore, and wrote two letters. One of them he addressed to his late vicar. It was the second letter—you have heard of the first. He deplored deeply any errors—he candidly called them errors—which he might have committed: he hinted that as regards money he could not understand that any harm had been done. 'I merely borrowed of you as from our common chest, certain moneys wanted for parish purposes. I forgot to tell you of it. What crime have I committed? As regards the other incident, youth might be pleaded an excuse. But I plead

none—I am deeply penitent. I can say no more. Meantime, I have been disgraced by being turned away from the Bishop at the last moment, in the face of the whole congregation. Is not that enough? I now ask you, first, to write to the Bishop withdrawing the charge of fraud and softening as much as you can, if not withdrawing altogether—which would be the more charitable line—the other business. This done, he will doubtless receive me at his next ordination. Secondly, I wish to return—my character unstained—to my post among our beloved flock. Any little coldness or suspicion will soon pass away. As I said to you the other day, it takes two to make a scandal. I shall not be one. May I venture to implore you not to be the other? Writing, as I do, in an empty garret—the room was an admirably furnished first floor front—‘bare and desolate and lonely’—he was sitting on a most comfortable chair and there was a bottle of quite delicate sherry, dry and fragrant, within reach of his hand—‘friendless and joyless’—a French novel of the lighter kind lay on the sofa—‘what more can I say? I am young, and this disgrace will never be forgotten. I have to live it down. Help me! Help me in the name of the holy services we have held together; for the sake of the happy, trusted past, and for my tears of penitence, which are tears of life blood and drops of fire. I write with a broken heart—I can only say that I *shall* live it down. But I want the trust and confidence of those who have known and loved me.’

I don't think this was a very convincing letter. But Paul's weak point was perhaps that he convinced himself so much more readily than other people. On the present occasion, as he read this letter after finish-

ing it, the tears welled up into his eyes and ran down his cheeks ; he wept freely and without restraint ; he wept and sobbed. He was truly penitent ; they were tears of blood ; his heart was torn ; and to comfort that rent organ he drank two glasses of the dry sherry before he folded the letter and put it in the envelope. It did not escape his observation that two of the largest tears had dropped upon the letter and that some of the letters were thus blurred and rendered misty. It would show the Vicar how real and unaffected was his penitence.

This letter despatched, he rested awhile with a turn at the French novel and another glass of sherry. Having quite recovered from the penitential emotion, which was pleasing, but could not be continued because it might spoil business, he addressed himself to the Bishop. He had to write a very difficult letter. For the little forgery could not be denied and the other matter had better be confessed. He said that after what had passed he had been unwilling to address his lordship until the first humiliation was over. That after three days he felt himself partly recovered and able to offer some explanation. 'As regards the charge of forgery, there is, my lord, this to be said. First of all the money was wanted urgently for parish purposes. I found the Vicar's cheque book on the table ; without thinking it was wrong I filled up a cheque, signed it with his name, took it myself, quite openly, to the bank, cashed it and applied the money to the parish purposes and, most unfortunately, forgot to tell the Vicar about it. I have been brought up in complete ignorance of the ways of the world as regards money ; I have never had any money ; I thought no

harm of drawing this money ; none of it was spent upon myself. When I heard that the Vicar took a harsh view of the matter I employed a friend to pay back the money. Well—it was spent on the poor of the parish ; but I would rather lose it all myself than incur the charge of taking it for myself.’

‘Good gracious !’ said the Bishop at this point. ‘Here is a tangle !’

‘The man spent the money in paying certain debts of his own,’ said the chaplain. ‘He is a consummate liar.’

The Bishop went on. ‘There is, next, a charge which I will only meet by assuring your lordship that the lady will be my wife to-morrow—or as soon as possible. I desire to prove my penitence—surely my sin has found me out—by taking the hardest work—in the poorest parish—among the worst of sinners—surely there must, somewhere, be sinners worse than I myself. In the deepest remorse I pen these lines. I accept poverty as my punishment, hard work as my consolation. Help me, my lord. I do not ask for the priesthood yet. Let me show my sorrow first and prove my powers among the fallen and the degraded.’

‘Ah !’ said the Bishop laying down the letter with a brow of corrugated iron.

‘This letter reveals a very unusual mind,’ he said to his chaplain. ‘One might wish to have the writer here as in a hospital—we want a hospital for crooked and crippled minds—and to watch the development of him. Who was it said that the study of mankind is a mathematical problem, and that every man is an enigma ? Here is a creature who commits a clumsy

and common forgery; there is not the least reason for believing that he feels the smallest shame or repentance for it; he shows that he has no such feeling. He steals, and is detected. He doesn't feel any shame, he thinks the matter will be just passed over. Nay, he now pretends that the money was wanted for parish purposes. He is a most accomplished liar—a brazen liar. . . . I wonder what his previous history has been. It is indeed an impudent letter. As for the second part of it, the alleged penitence is the most palpable sham. There is no true ring about it. Write to him in reply. Tell him that he must continue to repent in order to save his soul alive—and not in order to get priest's orders. Tell him also that under no circumstances will I allow him to officiate again in my diocese as a deacon, nor will I bestow upon him the order of the priesthood.'

This instruction the chaplain faithfully, even zealously, carried out, so that the young man was for a short time heavy in spirit, because he knew not how, outside the Church, he was to live.

As for the Vicar, when he got his epistle he read it aloud disdainfully; he scoffed as he read; he tossed it to his wife. 'An impudent hypocrite!' he said. 'I shall write and tell him so. He penitent! Not a bit of it. Spent the money on the parish, did he? Liar! I shall write and tell him so.' And he did.

When Paul had finished these letters it was close upon seven o'clock. At this time the mind of man naturally turns in the direction of dinner. This led him to think of his resources, because dinner cannot be obtained without money. He spread out his money

on the table and counted it. There were ten five-pound notes, which he had borrowed of his friend at the club, and there was the sum of 3*l.* 14*s.* 6*d.* in gold and silver—total, fifty-three pounds, fourteen shillings, and sixpence. The money constituted his whole possessions. There was a small sum due to him from his late Vicar, but then he owed more than that at his former lodgings. Well, fifty-three pounds—there seemed a good deal of spending in fifty-three pounds; four months' spending perhaps. He would have a little holiday. He dined comfortably, if not luxuriously, at a West End restaurant, with a pint of Sauterne—he was at that time no drinker, but he liked, in small quantities, dainty wines, such as Hock, Still Moselle, Vin de Grave, Sauterne or Bucellas. After dinner he remembered a place which he had not seen since he first assumed the responsibilities of a deacon. It was a palace in a certain square, where they have a wonderful ballet every evening. A most admirably conducted palace, yet not quite the place for the spiritually minded. Thither he fared and gazed at the stage and at the company, which in its turn gazed upon him in wonder and in joy, because he was really and unmistakably a parson, and so few parsons were ever seen in that palace. When the performance was over he went out into the square; he did not want to go home, his lodgings would be too dull after the blaze of light, the blare of the music, and the troops of dancing girls. Then he remembered another place to which he had been once taken: a place not far from the Haymarket. Could he find it again?

The establishment called itself a club—doubtless, therefore, it was a club. At the entrance stood a

functionary with a gold stripe down his legs and a gold band round his cap who invited 'members' to sign their names in a book. Paul signed the name of his late vicar, with the address quite clearly written, and mounted the red-carpeted stairs.

A club, indeed, it was—a most beautiful club. There was a band playing in one room, a small band playing softly, a band discoursing a wonderful waltz ; there were dancers in that room. The young man looked on and his brain reeled. Music, and feasting, and wine, and maidens fair—everything was here. There was another room where supper tables were laid out ; here was a bar and a young lady dispensing drinks and a waiter opening champagne, and parties of two or of four or of six taking supper with laughter and merriment. And in another room was a pair of tables where they were having a little quiet baccarat ; and another room where they were enjoying, rather noisily, a little nap ; and another room where there prevailed a deadly quiet while a few gentlemen in pairs played écarté.

A beautiful little club : so gentlemanly—the manager himself, who was there every night and knew the place, made this remark—so completely a little heaven below.

Paul stayed there all night, he made friends readily, he danced a little, he took some supper, he talked and laughed, and he enjoyed the evening so much that he entirely forgot the trouble with the Bishop and the Vicar. He went to the club the next night, and the night after.

A week later Paul looked ruefully at his purse. Out of the fifty-three pounds there were left only

eight. His holiday, he reflected, had lasted much less time than he expected.

Money must be made somehow. In two or three weeks he would be stranded. There was always Maggie—yet he shrank from begging of her so soon ; he did not want, just then, too much talk of conscience—he must make money. The Church, at least for a time, must be considered as out of the question.

Now, in these days, how does a young man hard up—or a young woman—always try to make money ? He writes a story—he always begins by writing a story. The young woman who is hard up does exactly the same thing. Then he sends it to an editor and expects to have an immense cheque returned immediately. Sometimes he improves his chances by telling the editor that he has ‘just dashed it off.’ Paul the Deacon did not do this. He knew a little about things ; he knew, for instance, that a storyteller very, very seldom springs into existence at a leap, but that he grows. He also knew at the outset that he had no power whatever of creating the smallest work of imagination. This knowledge, which he had acquired by painful efforts two or three years before, saved him present disappointment. He therefore invented a new and an ingenious plan. That is to say, his method was not absolutely new, because the thing has been worked before, but it had hitherto been worked in a more rudimentary manner. His method, in fact, was this. He went to the British Museum ; he hunted up old magazines, especially American magazines of thirty years ago, a period when an American magazine hardly ever came into this country. He found stories there which,

with a very little alteration, answered his purpose perfectly. He copied them out, changing names, places, and dates, and sometimes altering the dialogue. When the first one was quite ready, he sent it to the editor of a certain monthly magazine with a letter. He said in this letter, boldly and impudently, knowing that boldness and impudence challenge attention, 'I send you what I am certain is a really good story. I have no name in literature, or I should make a bargain with you. As it is, I will let you have it at your ordinary price. You will do well to read it. I do not enclose stamps for its return, because you will not return it, except in proof.' He signed himself Paul Iliffe.

A very good letter to send with a good story; not a good letter to send with rubbish. The thing did come back, in proof, and it was an excellent story, and he got a moderate cheque, no doubt as much as the magazine could afford. And the editor asked for another—and another—and another. Meantime he had tried two other editors, also with success. The name of Paul Iliffe began to get known. People looked for his stories, and the cheques came in; not, of course, enormous cheques, but modest cheques, as big as could be expected. He went but seldom to the all-night club, and he lived in cheap lodgings. He had found an excellent way of making money, and being, as before stated, young and buoyant, he did not ask himself how long the game would last.

It actually lasted for eight months: it was not found out during all that time. Yet he had planted as many as twelve stories; and he had three or four more nearly ready. They were all taken from the

same American magazine. Perhaps the source of his information was observed at the Museum; perhaps accident revealed the truth; perhaps somebody else was planning a similar method. Anyhow, the crash came.

It came in the form of a letter to the 'Athenæum,' in which the writer pointed out that three stories, all bearing the signature of Paul Iliffe, were all three purloined—he said purloined—from the pages of an old American magazine called 'The Knickerbocker.' This abominable letter also quoted passages which showed that the things could not be considered as imitations, but were actual copies, word for word, line for line, with only the names changed.

Paul saw a reference to the letter in the bill of a morning paper. When he had got the 'Athenæum' and read the letter, he hastened to change at once his lodgings and his name. As none of his editors had ever seen him, he was comparatively safe. The unfinished stories in his hands he would send, he thought, under another name, to other magazines. He was not greatly concerned about the incident. A little paragraph, which followed a few days later, concerned him less because he did not see it. In that paragraph it was stated that the 'Paul Iliffe' who had just been convicted of copying old stories and selling them for new was the Rev. Paul Leighan, who, it would be remembered, had been turned out of the Cathedral at the very moment of obtaining priest's orders.

'An impudent scoundrel!' said his old vicar. 'I said so before. An impudent scoundrel!'

'Behold the penitent soul, my lord,' said the bishop's chaplain.

Maggie read the paragraph. And this was the man she loved!

Paul tried another editor, writing under another name. This suspicious person wrote that the story was very good, but there had been certain frauds recently practised upon editors, and he must ask, first of all, who his contributor was; a reference to respectability would satisfy him, but it was necessary to guard against imposture. He tried again, and got much the same reply. That game was ended.

In former days, when a man became bankrupt in reputation as well as in purse, there was but one resource left open to him. You remember the brilliant, ambitious, unscrupulous adventurer in Lytton's novel, who comes to signal and hopeless grief; he ends his days as a miserable usher in a private school. That was the only resource. The ushers were men who had either gone down, or men who had no hope of getting up. Now they are young gentlemen fresh from the University, athletes, learned in winners, great in records, and full of confidence in themselves and of pride in their work. Not a single broken-down, discredited, once ambitious, bad man is now to be found in any private school. There are, in fact, many openings for such a man: there is literature, there is journalism, there is the stage, there is finance in its lower branches, there is betting in all its branches, and there are many fancy professions in which a man may do pretty well although he has lost his character and his position. You have seen how the Deacon began with literature, artfully stealing his wares; you shall see how he went on. To begin with, if he did not mind publicity—and the story of the crime and

impediment were now pretty well forgotten—he could sing. He had a fine tenor—not a great voice, but a fine silvery, musical tenor. Paul found that he could turn this talent to account. He therefore became the leading tenor in a wandering company of nigger minstrels, and used to sing, with great feeling and with upturned eyes, songs of the domestic affections. The troupe was only moderately successful, and the ghost sometimes refused to walk. It was probably during the tour, and perhaps in consequence of meagre diet, that he began to take irregular nips and drinks. Such a man as Paul does not become a vulgar drunkard; he sips while the drunkard laps; but the effect is much the same in loss of will and nerve, and in moral deterioration. Perhaps there was little further deterioration possible. But there was possible recovery, and this possibility began to suffer loss.

The nigger troupe came to a calamitous end. The manager bolted, and the company dispersed and had to get back to town, and other engagements, as best they could.

Such an accident is not uncommon; it is even expected; there are these ups and downs for the wandering minstrel.

Paul returned to London. By this time he had made some acquaintances among the strollers and wanderers. One of the nigger troupe gave him elementary lessons in the art of acting; why should he not go on the stage? For the same reason that he could not write, because he had no imagination outside himself and his own emotions, and no creative faculty whatever. However, he was still young; he was still as handsome as Apollo; his voice was still rich and

musical, in spite of the nips and casual drinks; his eyes were still lovely and expressive, especially to young ladies of a certain type. He did go on the stage. On account of these gifts and graces he obtained a place with a salary—a small salary—and he was presented with a part. Here fortune favoured him, almost for the last time. The part was that of a comic curate; all Paul had to do was to play it as he himself would have acted it off the stage. He did this; he played the part so well that everybody declared it to be perfectly natural and a most promising performance. A young man who made so much of a part so small was certain to succeed as soon as he had got over certain blemishes caused by inexperience; for instance, a very young actor finds difficulty in carrying any part of himself, hands, legs, head, shoulders, so that the house will not think him awkward. They spoke confidently of the London stage for him. With this view, they took pains to teach him these and other things pertaining to his new profession. He was slow to learn, having acquired a certain set of positions and postures which he could neither shake off nor forget. Then they changed the piece and gave him a more important part and a different part. Alas! the dream of the London stage was rudely dispelled. For Paul proved a stick; the piece was ruined by his great stickiness, and he got the sack.

During all this time he paid no visit at all to Margaret. She remained in her flat, expecting him to come or to write for money. She heard nothing about him, and waited, not hoping for any good thing. She knew him too well to hope. That he did not call upon her proved that he was lower down the hill.

Men like Paul, if they get shabby, cease to present themselves in person. If they make any sign at all, it is by a begging letter. But Paul made no application for money.

Margaret went abroad. She travelled with friends, and tried to forget this man. She could not; his image, the contrast of what he was and what he ought to have been, was always with her. Men wanted to make love to her; she kept them at arm's length. When she returned to her flat after more than a year's absence, she found no letter from Paul and no sign of his existence. Of the nigger troupe episode she heard nothing, nor of the stage business, both of which had been carried on under different names. She had read the 'Paul Iliffe' incident. Since then there was silence. But she knew that he would come back some day, some time, and she waited. She had been in love with a ghost, with the original ideal after whom Paul made up, with the soul expelled to make room for a devil. She waited, praying that the soul would some day return to the poor demoniac body.

His next step was a return to the stage of the music hall as a Lion Tenor. In this capacity he returned to the sentimental ditties of the nigger company, and when he was encored sang 'Twas in Trafalgar's Bay,' and 'My Pretty Jane' and 'Good-bye Sweetheart.' And here he continued for a space of twelve months. For salary he did pretty well; sometimes making five-and-twenty pounds a week, and sometimes less. He possessed so much dignity that he did not become a Lion Comique, nor did he put on fancy costumes, nor did he sing 'Ri-tiddy-iddy-iddy-ri-ti-ti.' The domestic affections, 'Grand-

mother's Chair,' 'Grandfather's Clock,' 'The Chord that Cracked,' and such themes, pleased his audience. His handsome face and his sentimental eyes—which now suggested the raptures of lawful and connubial love—pleased the people, who always like songs of the domestic affections better than anything else you can give them.

As for his private life during this period, it was that of the prodigal son, his money, which he got so easily, was spent in riotous living, his friends, like those of the fast young man, stuck by him so long as he had money. Who would not stick by a man who is always going to draw five-and-twenty pounds next Saturday? There is a good deal of spending, mind you, in five-and-twenty pounds. It does not go far among a large company in champagne, but in soda and whiskey and cogent drinks it goes a very long way. Therefore Paul was popular among a certain set of music-hall artistes and music-hall loungers.

While he was singing an encore one night he became aware that there was a man in the hall who knew him. In fact, it was his old friend Homerton Smith who was in the front and who had found him. This man sent round his card and followed it.

'So, Paul,' he said, 'this is what you are doing, is it?'

'This is what I am doing. As you see,' Paul replied, shortly.

'Yes, you've got a very fine voice. Don't you think you might make a—a more profitable use of it?'

'Perhaps you have something more profitable to suggest.'

‘Well—perhaps. Will you come to my chambers and talk? It is a long time since we met last.’

Paul hesitated. There might be questions—reference to conscience, honour, and other deficiencies. His friend looked serious. There was that last cheque; would he ask for explanations? Hardly. Besides it is quite easy to express regret and to promise payment as soon as . . . *enfin*, he nodded his head and they drove away together.

‘You will take a soda and whiskey, of course,’ said his friend, ‘and a cigar? Here you are, and now,’ he threw himself into a chair and plunged at once into things disagreeable.

‘Your life, I take it, is rough, Paul, isn’t it? Quite so. Rather. Your companions now are of the lower kind, presumably; not quite so cultivated as your old friends of the Cathedral and the Church, perhaps. There is too much drink among them, I should think. Their views of life are rather lower than you used to maintain. Your face, Paul, shows the fact. It is coarsening and worsening. You are still a handsome man, but something has been lost—a good deal has been lost. You are nothing like so good-looking as you were.’

‘One cannot always be young.’

‘Quite true. The last time we met was at the club. You called there and found me with Euston Jones, who is a journalist. It was the day after the rumpus at the Cathedral. You showed us, if you remember, a letter from the Bishop’s chaplain, saying that the Bishop was satisfied of your innocence. That letter was not written by the Bishop’s chaplain.’

‘No, I wrote it myself, with my own hand. I

forged that letter. Damn it all, Homerton Smith, when a man is cornered he will fight with any weapon—he must.’ In the old days Paul would not have used so warm and vulgar an expletive.

‘You had to go out of the civilised world, and you went out of it with a bounce, just as an actor leaves the stage with a shake of the fist at the gallery and a sham slam of the sham exit. You dropped out, and we went on without you. It was a pity, Paul. You are one of those men to whom much is allowed and almost everything forgiven. I myself—but let that pass. You might have lived it down, because no one would have spoken of the scandals; and indeed there would have been no scandals. A lady, it seems, interfered, and not only repaid the money to the Vicar, but took care of the other person concerned in the business, of which, I believe, nobody knows anything. So that affair blew over. You might—I don’t know—perhaps you might have gone back to the Bishop. Perhaps not, however. It really was a tough job to get over. Well, but then came the Paul Iliffe episode. After that it certainly became difficult to return.’

‘It was a false charge,’ Paul cried eagerly; ‘I did what other writers always do. I found my plots and I used them. Shakspeare did it. Everybody does it.’

‘Very good, we won’t dispute that point. Unfortunately, the world took another view. However, the main point just now is that you are now on the high road to destruction. Say, old man,’—he sat up and spoke earnestly—‘why don’t you go up in the world instead of down? I think it must be quite as easy.’

Then began, with the help of this Samaritan, a new experience for Paul the Deacon. He got a variety entertainment with songs and sketches, something after the style of Mr. Corney Grain. He was not a very versatile actor, because his strength lay almost wholly in the sentimental line, but he could play well and his voice was still very good. The life of the variety entertainer is chequered with light and shade; it is hilly, all up and down, with no high levels, and sometimes there are broad bottoms in the valleys. The entertainment lasted, with the help of friend Homerton Smith, the whole winter. Then Mr. Homerton Smith being called abroad, the entertainer lost his popularity, or was robbed, or something, and was fain to go bankrupt. He went through the Court, and had to confess, before he got his discharge, that he was none other than the deacon who was refused priest's orders under such startling circumstances, and who was afterwards charged with palming off old stories as new, and who, after that, became a nigger minstrel. This story both amused and astonished the world.

One would willingly pass over the next passage, but the story must be followed out to the end.

When he left the Court of Bankruptcy he had, for all possessions, the clothes he stood in and a few pounds in his pockets. He might have gone back to the music hall, but he was afraid. Everybody now knew from the papers that he was in orders—in deacon's orders only, it is true, but the people do not observe nice distinctions. He might have had himself advertised as the 'Rev. Paul Leighan, B.A., Lion Tenor,' and gone on to meet the applause of the

multitude. That method occurred to him, and it was the boldest and most likely method. After all, people like a man who is game. But Paul was afraid. Or he might go on without taking any notice of the exposure, and be 'guyed' by the gallery. Not even the most brazen of music-hall singers likes being guyed by the gallery, if only because the proprietor considers the fact in the next adjustment of salaries. Paul was still extremely sensitive to the opinion of the house. He did not therefore return to the music hall, nor did he face the gallery. He became, or tried to become, a journalist. There are journalists and journalists. There are members of a very important and honourable profession; and there are hangers-on, pickers-up of odds and ends. Paul could not write leading articles; he had neither the knowledge nor the power. He could not write descriptive papers; he had not the necessary imagination. He could not report anything, because he did not know shorthand. He was not offered reviewing work, because to be a reviewer one must at least look respectable, and Paul was shabby. Therefore Paul had to become a picker-up of odds and ends. He ran about at night collecting things; he hovered on the outskirts of crowds; he stood about in tavern bars. It was a miserable experience; he could not make a good penny-a-liner. He did not know what was wanted or where to look for it. The true purveyor of flimsy must have some knowledge of humanity, together with some sympathy. Paul had never studied any specimen of humanity except himself—nor had he in the whole world a single friend who would help him. Nor, again, had he that kind of mind which grows sharper in adversity

and is most surely developed by necessity. Great Gaster, first Master of Arts, taught nothing to the unlucky Paul—not ingenuity, not resource. He taught only the first law of human nature—that one must feed. How? Just in the old, old way, the sweet pre-historic way, when man arose from his couch in the morning and went forth to slay, to rob, to hunt.

The law always goes one way with the most resistless determination. If you go the other way, there is bound to arrive a collision in which the law is bound to get the best of it. Paul went the other way. Indeed, he knew not how else to live; he found himself compelled to go the other way. When you get to the end of all things, what are you to do?

This is a terrible question. There is a stage on the downward path where the wretch pauses—or seems to pause. He has still the appearance and the habiliments of a gentleman, using the word almost in its widest sense; his boots may be down at heel, but his hat is fairly respectable; he no longer has a watch and chain; his linen is not of the brightest—yet there is still hope for him. Just as he stands, he might sit down at a desk and begin to clerk it. If no one gives him that desk?—This was Paul's case; no one gave him anything. Then there is only one thing to do; he must put off the outward appearance and show of a gentleman; he must sell, or pawn, or exchange his broadcloth for corduroy; he must become a man with a pair of ready hands and a pair of willing feet. He must sell papers, matches, or the newest marvel for a penny. If he will not do this, if he still clings to his gentility, it means going over the line. Paul had already crossed that line. He crossed it again.

They called it obtaining money under false pretences. They said that you must not sell to a tradesman—he was a confiding German who had opened in Soho a ‘*Delikatessen Handlung*’—the support obtained by personal influence and close friendship with the proprietors, even if you are lucky enough to be the private friend of the editors, of the ‘*Times*,’ the ‘*Daily News*,’ the ‘*Standard*,’ the ‘*Daily Telegraph*,’ the ‘*Morning Post*’ and the ‘*Daily Chronicle*.’ The court laughed at the case; it was certainly comic—the prisoner’s impudence in pretending to possess this influence was as comic as the German’s blind confidence. Besides, in the course of the case, there came out the former history of the prisoner, the Rev. Paul Cannington Leighan, B.A., who had been balked of his priest’s orders at the very last moment; who, under the name of Paul Iliffe, had sent old stories to magazines as new, and was acquiring some name as a storyteller when he was found out; who had been a nigger minstrel, an actor, a music-hall singer, a ‘variety’ entertainer, a bankrupt, and many other things. The papers had playfully spoken of him as the Frisky Deacon. When the case had been thoroughly enjoyed by all parties concerned except one, the Court enjoined that one person to stay at home for six months and to occupy himself during that time with light work, such as can be done by inexperienced fingers.

One of the papers called attention to this singular and chequered career. Half the ingenuity, the writer pointed out, expended on all these rogueries might have given this man an honoured place in the Church of England. Quite wrong. There was never any

ingenuity at all. The man's tricks were elementary and clumsy. He wanted to get some money and he took the easiest way. Such a man always takes the easiest way. It is the greatest mistake to suppose that the common rogue is an ingenious person. He takes the easiest way. If he does not, he is either an honest man or an uncommon rogue. Something successful in the sporting line is what the uncommon rogue desires; therefore some combination hitherto untried. The uncommon rogue soars high above suspicion of roguery; he becomes an object of admiration; his ingenuity makes him rich. The unfortunate Paul lacked that keen wit that makes the uncommon rogue; he took the easy way.

Margaret, in her flat, read the paper. Paul had not seen her since that day when he came straight from the Cathedral. She had read of him from time to time—read of his disgraces and his shames. The man was hopelessly disgraced, degraded, and ruined. Nothing could now restore him to his former place. No repentance could bring him back to the world of honour. Yet he had still before him all his life—he was as yet well on the sunny side of thirty. There is always hope for the young—at least it is, happily, so thought and taught. For my part, seeing the intensity of the temptation for the young, I doubt whether their case is more hopeful than that of the old, who may be vicious but are no longer deluded by imagination.

‘He will come back to me,’ she said. ‘I suffered him to kiss me, to speak of love, in the midst of his disgrace. I have made him part and parcel of myself. When he comes back to me I will——’ What could she do?

CHAPTER V

THE SEAT OF THE SINNER

Six months—six hundred years in reality, but they called it six months—after the painful business of the criminal court, the prisoner was allowed to put on his own garments. They were now so desperately shabby that he would have preferred the prison uniform, but for the prejudice which attaches to it. His hair had been for a week or two allowed to grow; he received the last visit from the chaplain, who afterwards quoted him as a terrible example how a mere profession of religion may harden the heart and make it dead and insensible to spiritual influences; and at last—at last—the prison doors were thrown open, and he stepped outside, a free man. He gasped and threw out his arms; he staggered like a drunken man; he was free.

Meditation in his cell had shown him certain living realities. He now clearly understood that the game was finished. Nothing that he had formerly done could be done again. He must find out a new way of living. He was still only eight-and-twenty; he had, perhaps, forty years of life left. At the ridiculously low estimate of half-a-crown a day for bare necessities, he must make that half-a-crown by his wits, with the burden of his past history upon his

back—a load which the world will never allow a man to lay down ; he must bear it till he dies. A man who has a trade may, perhaps, get employment if he is lucky, whatever his character. A man who has a profession—especially if that be the sacred profession—if he loses his character can never find work. No name was more blown upon than his own. The story caught the popular imagination. There was something ludicrous in the life of the Rev. Paul Leighan, B.A., Deacon in Holy Orders. The comic and frivolous papers not only called him the Frisky Deacon, they called him also the Irrepressible Deacon ; they called him Jack in the Box ; they drew pictures of him at various stages of his career. They made a personage of him. He became as popular as Ally Sloper. He could not, either, disguise himself under another name ; thanks to the music halls and the variety entertainments and his handsome, unmistakable face, there was hardly anyone better known than himself. He had done his best by riotous living to spoil his face, but it was as yet unspoiled ; the fine lines and delicate curves were there still, with those lovely eyes which had won so many women's hearts.

The six months of seclusion had been a beastly time, a time wholly without comfort. At first he tried to become penitent ; he remembered former occasions on which real tears of penitence flowed freely ; he sat in his cell and waited for the familiar emotion. Strangely, it failed to appear ; nor did he, during his whole residence in that place, once feel—though he looked for it and waited for it—the overwhelming faintness which accompanies the true emotion of repentance. They gave him the Bible to read ; he

turned over the pages with lack-lustre eye ; the words, which he knew by heart, had no meaning to him—none whatever. Even the services of the chapel failed to awaken any of the old emotions. You cannot really feel religious while you are sitting in a pew all by yourself, dressed in prison garb. It is absurd. He sang the hymns because it was a relief to use his voice. To sing in a church without having anybody to mark the rapture of his eyes was a miserable, lonely, unsatisfying exercise. He essayed words of religion with the chaplain, who snubbed him ; told him that he was a most disgraceful and infamous person ; ordered him not to dare the use of those words until he had learned the infamy of his present position and the horrible wickedness of his past ; said he was the worst man in the whole prison because he had sinned against the Light. Then Paul sulked, and refused to talk with the chaplain at all. Such a chaplain was a disgrace to any civilised prison.

He thought at one time that he should like a change from the cell, which was certainly dull, to the infirmary. He therefore shammed, but the doctor . . . Why go on ? The doctor was no more sympathetic than the chaplain. However, it was all over : he was out—what next ?

He stood outside the prison gates irresolute, despairing. He perfectly understood his own position : he had no friends at all. By this time he had given up thinking of the girl who had once loved him ; how could he think of her out of the depths ? Besides, his companions of the music hall and the tavern bars made it impossible for him to think of her. How, he asked himself, was he going to earn his daily bread ?

A man in rags and tatters, leading a child in each hand, passed along the road bawling 'Sweet By and Bye.' A maidservant ran up the area steps and tossed him a penny and vanished. 'That way?' asked Paul with a sinking heart.

A string of men crossed the road lower down. They were sandwich men; each walked between two boards, his face sticking out above—every man's face gloomy and black. 'Or that way?' he asked.

A gang of men were working on the road. They had brooms and spades, and were raking the mud into heaps for the carts to collect. They were broken-down wretches, once prosperous, or expecting to be prosperous. They drew two shillings a day from the parish; they wore boots in several stages of ruin, but all letting in the mud and slush, and the day was cold. 'Or that way?' Paul asked. He was so miserable that he thought it the best way, because such a morning's work in the half-frozen mud would probably kill a man off at once—and so an end.

Then there came stepping along the street a young girl dressed in a familiar uniform. She had a sweet face, not pretty, but pleasing, with bright and kindly eyes. She saw him standing there alone and doubtful; she recognised the prison bird; she ran across.

'Just out?' she asked. He nodded. 'Waiting for friends?'

'I have no friends—not one friend in the whole world—so help me God.'

'Don't take in vain the name of the God you have offended,' she replied severely. 'What was the trouble? Don't tell me if you don't like. Some say

they were innocent, but it is a pity to tell lies—you were not innocent—your face shows it. I once saw an innocent man come out of prison and I know the difference. That man came out in a rage and we couldn't convert him. His heart was turned to stone.'

'They called it obtaining money under false pretences. What matters?'

'I thought it looked like money. Sometimes I pray the Lord to take all the money out of the world. Money it is that mostly fills the pit. Never mind now. Come with me to barracks and rest a bit while you look about you. Barracks is the place for you. There you can sit down and talk things over. We're all friends together at barracks, you know—some of us brother soldiers, but all of us friends.'

She took his hand and held it with a warm and sisterly grasp, and led him, now as unresisting as a lamb, along with her. 'Oh!' she murmured softly, as if he was not listening—but that was her craftiness and subtlety. 'Oh! good Lord, here is a gentleman—look at his face—a gentleman and a scholar, I should say. Look into his thoughts. I think they are hard and wicked. He hasn't turned from his wickedness yet. They haven't converted him with their prison chapel—oh, no!—that is left for us. He has never worked with his hands. Lord, break up his stubborn heart for him. Break him up. Break him up. He knows his Redeemer by hearsay; we shall not have to teach him anything; we only have to give him food and love, and presently—grant it, Lord—he will give way altogether, and be broken up.' Now, even as she spoke, there stole into his heart a faint image of the old emotion which formerly he had

loved to awaken in himself and others. But this time it stayed there and grew there. He made no reply to her while she continued her conversation on his case with the Lord. But he felt softened. The chaplain with his reproaches had only hardened him. The gentle touch of this girl's fingers softened him—it was so long since anybody had taken any interest at all in him. He knew who she was—a Salvation Army girl—and he knew what she wanted, and why she was so loving; but he was weak from his solitary confinement and the prison diet. Tears filled his eyes—real tears—not simulated. They were tears of sorrow and of helplessness over himself and his sufferings; they were by no means tears of repentance. The girl saw them and went on murmuring soft and kindly prayers. So he walked beside her with drooping head and quivering lips, quite ready to be broken up whenever the moment should arrive.

He was taken to a place where they gave him a hot breakfast, and everybody in the place came and shook hands with him as if they were really glad to see him. When he said he was that morning out of prison they murmured gently, as if it was his misfortune, and as if it might happen to anybody, and as if it was not his fault at all. They said that many great sinners came to them from prison, and that many other great sinners who also came to them had never been sent to prison at all. They gave him books to read, and they told him that he might stay there while he looked about for work. They all seemed to be very busy, but they found time to look in now and then where he was sitting with some other men and to say a friendly word. The girl who had

captured him came half-a-dozen times in the course of the day to ask him what she could do for him. She sat beside him and cooed and crooned over him, and told him what a curious chance it was that she had met him ; nay, call it not a chance but a special ordering, so that she could not choose but cross the road to speak to him.

And would he tell her who he was and all about it, and what friends he had, and would he let her be his friend and help him ? Oh ! there was room in the barracks for everybody—all the sinners. The Lord would send the General money enough ; and who could tell ? Perhaps he, too, when the Lord had broken him up, might enlist in the Army and do great work as a valiant soldier. No one could tell to what heights he might not rise when once he had found conviction.

Who could resist the blandishments of such a Siren ? Not Paul, certainly, to whom every pretty girl was a Siren, a Circe, a Delilah. He hearkened ; his heart was moved ; the girl was soft, kind, persuasive ; it was long since anyone had pretended to take interest in him. Therefore at length he opened his mouth ; he spoke, ‘ My name,’ he said, ‘ is Paul Leighan. I was in prison for alleged fraud—for obtaining money under——’

‘ What ? ’ she cried. ‘ You are the Rev. Paul Leighan, the Frisky Deacon. You are the man who——Oh ! it is wonderful ! Oh ! that we should get you ! Oh ! an awfully wicked man ! ’

She ran and told the others, and they all came to gaze upon him—the captains and the lieutenants and the rank and file ; they shook hands with him again ;

they congratulated him; they congratulated each other; they foresaw another triumph for the Army. Some of them laughed, but checked themselves. 'Wait,' they said, 'till the evening. Then you shall see.'

Presently they gave him dinner—a much better dinner than the prison afforded; in fulness of time they gave him tea. He wanted to go out, feeling a kind of yearning after strong drink; but the girl who had captured him made him sit down again. No, he must not go out; he should not go out; he should have no drink; more tea if he liked, but no drink; he must stay where he was, with his new friends; he must wait at least until the evening. It was of no use—his will was broken by confinement, low food, and discipline—to contend against the strong and healthy will of the girl. Paul obeyed.

In the evening there was the customary service, with addresses, hymns and prayers, at the barracks. But perhaps the presence of this most interesting subject—this curiously wicked subject—caused some increase in the fervour of the speakers.

Paul, for his part, sat on a bench and listened. He was in a highly emotional, hysterical condition to begin with. As the speakers became more fiery he lost all control of will and reason. Presently, when the singing—good singing as he knew—hot, fiery singing, full of the rapture which he remembered—began, his head went round and round, he sprang to his feet shrieking, he threw up his arms, he fell headlong on the floor, crying, laughing, and saying he knew not what. Miracle! Miracle! One more prison bird struck with conviction!

When the strength of the hysterical fit was partly spent Paul was placed on the stool of Inquirers—or was it that of Repentance? A stalwart captain laid a hand upon his shoulder, and exhorted him where to look and what to say and what to expect. The girl who had brought him to the place held both his hands in hers, and kneeled beside him and prayed aloud, tears of praise and thankfulness falling down her cheeks.

‘Oh, Glory!’ she cried—she had such a voice as he loved—a low contralto—and she spoke as if she were singing. Her voice seemed to penetrate his dazed dark brain like a ray of sunshine. ‘Oh, Glory!—one more precious soul! Oh, he is saved!—he is saved!’

In this way Paul was saved.

On the following Sunday evening, between the exercises of praise and prayer, in the largest hall of the Army, a recruit stood up—a handsome young man, pale, tall, big-eyed—and began to speak. For a whole hour he spake as never man among them yet had spoken. He held them enthralled. He told them a most terrible story of wickedness—his own—beginning from his school-days; he spared no detail; he gave them a thrilling insight into the All Night Club, with a full account of the wickedness that went on there. ‘Spare them nothing! Tell everything!’ said the girl who had converted him. He did not shrink from revealing the less pleasing features of the music hall—and in fact he went into much greater details than I have been able to give; he narrated with copious additions the story which you have read. He concluded by singing to them one of their own hymns, into which he poured

so much pity, so much repentance, so much fervour of faith, that the congregation—an emotional company, it is true—wept and shed tears without restraint or control. And when he finished, sinking on his knees before them all, they sprang to their feet and sang a hymn of triumph.

The Lion of Judah shall break every chain,
And give to the people the Victory again ;
Again—again ;
Shall give to the people the Victory again.

Once more, and again once more :

The Lion of Judah shall break every chain,
And give to the people the Victory again ;
Again—again ;
Shall give to the people the Victory again.

And there were such bursts of the silver cornet, such beating of the drums, such banging of tambourines, such shouts of glorified, triumphant, and forgiven sinners—because the greater the sin the louder is the triumph—that the noise of their meeting resounded in all the streets around, insomuch that sinners longed to aggravate and increase and multiply their sins so as to obtain such a triumph when their hour of repentance should arrive.

Paul was a recruit. He had returned to his old emotions ; he was once more for the time happy ; no one threw the past in his teeth ; the more enthusiastic of the Army even envied him those depths of vice with which their own poor little commonplace sins—which could not be made picturesque—were not for a moment comparable. And a repentant clergyman of the Establishment ! And once more the Rev. Paul Leighan, B.A., the irrepressible Deacon, the nigger

minstrel, the convict, the Frisky Deacon, the Jack-in-the Box, figured in the papers this time as an interesting penitent—one of the most interesting penitents ever captured—better than the man who had been forty years drunk—better than the converted prize-fighter—better than the repentant clown—better than the reclaimed pickpocket. Multitudes there were who went to hear him preach and sing.

CHAPTER VI

THE LAST CHANCE

‘A PERSON, miss, wants to see you.’

‘Who is it, Esther?’

‘A Salvation Army person, miss. He won’t give his name or his business.’

‘Well, I don’t suppose he wants to kill me. Let him come in.’

It was three years and more since Margaret had seen her lover. You have heard what happened to him during those years. She had read in the papers some of those things. Nothing had happened to her. She still lived in her flat, and she was still single.

She looked up when her visitor entered, and started, but quickly controlled herself and spoke with outward calm. ‘You, Paul? I expected you before this. I saw by the papers that you had joined the Salvation Army. I thought you would come to tell me something about yourself as soon as you had anything to tell that was not disgraceful.’

Paul stood humbly, perhaps too humbly, hanging his head, perhaps too low.

‘I come to tell you, Margaret,’ he said, almost in a whisper, ‘that I have at last found and proved the reality of words.’

‘If that is true, it is the happiest thing that was ever granted to you.’

‘I know now what is meant by the words which I formerly used without meaning. I do not excuse myself, Margaret; but remember that I used those words as a boy, even, twice a day for years and years, and that they became like my surplice, something that could be taken off or put on at pleasure—part of a ceremony. They lost their meaning to me, Margaret. I have waited till I could come and tell you this truthfully. I remember certain words you used when I was here last—the day after that unlucky Cathedral business.’

Margaret was sitting at her writing-table. Paul stood at the door. She walked to the other side of the table and took her seat there, so that the table stood between them. Thus fortified she made answer:

‘What I said three years ago was said to a young man who had committed great sins, but was not past hope. That man has changed for the worse and for the worst. Your record was bad even then: it is now unspeakable. You now tell me, however, that you have repented—that you have found the meaning of certain words. So far it is good. What made you come here?’

‘I thought you would have welcomed a repentant sinner.’

‘No. I do not welcome you. I had no desire ever to see you again. But I knew that you would come. You have caused me the greatest misery and self-reproach. Still, I should be, I think—nay, I am sure that I should be glad to think that you are, as you say, a penitent. But the time has long since

passed when I could welcome you. On the contrary, I look upon you, I think of you, with shame, only to think that I could at any time love such a man. I made an idol, a creature of fancy that had no existence, and I clothed it with your form, I gave it your eyes, I loved that idol, not you. Oh ! I never loved you ! It was another creature who was expelled the Cathedral—not my idol. It was my idol who kissed me—not you. No—never you. I now understand what you were always—a man without heart, without morals, without truth, without honour—in a word, without a soul. You have ruined my life. If an honourable man were to love me, I could not give him the lips that have been kissed—by such as you. I could not give him the hand that was promised—to such a man as you.'

'I am sorry, Margaret,' he said. 'I did not expect to find love left, but I hoped to find some interest—at least some little kindness.'

'I have told you how I now regard you. Have you anything more to say ?'

'If I may be allowed to stay long enough to say it.'

'Say it, then.'

'You speak of my past history. Well, it is, I acknowledge, a most unhappy history——'

'Call it most disgraceful.'

'——but I have been so unlucky. Nothing but bad luck has pursued me all my life.'

'You stole money at school——'

'What are a schoolboy's faults ? Are they to be remembered ?'

'You stole money at Oxford——'

'No—no——'

‘You stole the Newdigate Prize—Mr. Homerton Smith told me the whole story—he who afterwards befriended you. Do not try to deceive yourself. Your own conduct has been the Fate that has pursued you with scourges. Your only misfortune is that you learned so early to mistake emotions called up at will for the reality of the spiritual life.’

‘Nothing can be said that is too bad for the past,’ he owned, without effort or shame. ‘Nothing, Margaret. But it is past and gone. It is quite gone.’ He threw open his arms to show that the past was really gone into the *ewigkeit*. ‘I have no past—I have now only a present and a future.’

‘Alas! the world will soon show you that your past exists as much as your present, Paul; a man can no more rid himself of his past life than he can rid himself of his shadow. It is always with him.’

‘Not with me. I have done with my past. I have the present, which is not—well—one is not proud of this dress’—he looked at his red shirt and his cap—‘and one is only a dissenter—yet it is not, I suppose, actually disgraceful—and the future, which, Margaret, with your help, shall be honourable.’

‘With my help?’

‘If you will listen for a moment, Margaret. I have recovered my old powers and more—ten times more. I can make them cry—I am ten times more eloquent than ever I was before.’

She looked at him sharply. She recognised the voice of the old Adam.

‘But I have to wear this uniform, as you see—a hideous thing. And my companions are common, horribly common and uncultivated. And the con-

gregations—they are of the lowest kind. And there have been already rows and misunderstandings. They talk of reducing me to the ranks if there are any more—any more misunderstandings. I yearn to join my own class again. I want to use my own liturgy, and to preach in a church again.'

'Will any bishop allow you to do so?'

'Not in England. I have thought that perhaps in America——'

'Will any bishop give you—what is it called?—a letter or testimonial of good conduct?'

'I think I can do without such a testimonial. I would go over to America and get known to some of the Episcopal clergy there. I should, of course, tell such parts of my life as should be known——'

'In other words, Paul, you would begin your new career with a chain of lies.'

'No—no; do not misrepresent me—pray do not; I would confess the sinful life, I would only suppress one or two of the details.'

'You would suppress, for instance, the prison?'

'Perhaps; I would rather do so, in fact, if my—my *conscience* approved.' He lifted his head quite proudly, just to emphasise the fact that he possessed at least a conscience.

'And the business of the Cathedral? You would conceal that too.'

'Of course. That would be indispensable.'

Margaret laughed scornfully. 'You are, indeed, a penitent. But, of course, you would be found out.'

'I thought it would be better to change my name. I would take my old name. I would return perhaps

to plain Samuel Canning—or, I thought, Cyril Canning—the name of Cyril has in itself a religious flavour. And when I had been long enough to show my devotion to good works and my faith—words being now real to me, Margaret——’

‘Yes,’ she said, doubtfully.

‘Then I would ask, and receive once more, deacon’s orders—to be followed in the usual way by——Margaret, I am at last in earnest—I see before me a noble career. I see an eloquent priest leading thousands upwards; he becomes a bishop—an archbishop; he lives a saintly life, he dies a saint confessed.’

‘You would enter upon that life with deception. You would conceal your deacon’s orders and take them anew. This seems to me a most awful wickedness. Oh, Paul! can a saintly life rest on such a basis? Believe me, the only saintly life for you is one of obscurity. If you are real in repentance seek out some post where you may do humble and useful work, and accept it as your punishment and your reparation. You are thinking, not of the saintly life, but of the glory of the saintly life. While you would lead your thousands upwards you would be gazing in the glass all the time and thinking what a lovely saint you looked.’

‘Is that all you believe of me?’

‘That is, indeed, all I can believe of you. Why, every word you say shows that you have not the first element of penitence. You have no shame; while you boast that you are a changed man, you are contriving new deceptions. Go! And never come to see me again.’

‘Margaret, help me to escape.’ His face changed;

he became a real suppliant instead of a sham penitent. 'Help me, I say. I hate my life ; these people fill me with loathing ; they are horribly vulgar ; the living is rough ; there is even privation ; there are no luxuries, not even the commonest. And there are already—I told you—accusations. I can't stand it. There will be another scandal—who knows what may happen ? Help me to get away. In a new country I can find work of some kind or other. Here, everything is closed to me except '—he shuddered. 'Oh ! Margaret, think of it!—except the barracks of the Salvation Army. Help me, Margaret, for the sake—of that shattered idol. You were always a thousand times too good for me. I confess that I was afraid of marrying you. I knew you would find me out. But help me, just because you did once believe me. Give me help, for the sake of that time, to escape from this den of despair and hypocrisy. Give me money so that I may go away—to America, or to Australia, or somewhere. Give me enough for a start. I want clothes, I want passage money, I want money to live upon while I am looking about me. I will mock you with no promises ; I may go to the Devil or I may go up hill instead of down—I don't know. Everything is uncertain except that I must go away from here lest a worse thing happens to me.'

He spoke for once with the earnestness of reality. What had he done in the Salvation Army ? What new scandals—what rows—were those of which he spoke ? Margaret was a woman. She gave way. She opened her desk ; she shaded her face to hide the tears in her eyes ; she drew out her cheque book and she wrote him a cheque for a hundred pounds—to the order of

Samuel Canning. She held it out without raising her head.

He took it—he gasped—he opened his mouth to speak—he spoke one or two broken words. She motioned, still not looking up, to the door. He turned and walked away.

When he was gone and the door was shut behind him and his footstep was no longer heard upon the stairs, Margaret sat down—to think about him. At any time, when anything, however little or unimportant, reminded her of Paul, she sat down to think about him. She had always in her mind what she called the real Paul—the man as he might have been, the man as he was intended to be; his emotional nature disciplined, filling his words with the fire of sincerity; his love of music making splendid the service of the Church; the man mounting upwards from the love of all to the veneration of all—what in the whole world surpasses the veneration of grovelling men and creeping women for the saintly life? This was the man she loved. As for the other man, he was so like the man she loved in many little things that she was interested in him. Interested in him—that way she put it. Who could love such a creature—so callous—of such colossal insensibility to shame; a man who at the very moment when he was professing the most bitter remorse was planning new deceptions; a man who was all religiosity without the least tincture of religion? Not that man—no—she loved the other man. Many women, in very sooth, do always love the other man.

She took pen and paper and wrote a kind of confession, which still lies in her desk, for no one in the world, except Paul and herself, knew of this strange

and even unnatural affection, which nothing—not even infamy and open disgrace—could destroy.

‘My life is ruined—by Paul,’ she wrote. ‘He lies always on my heart—the ideal of my early dreams. No woman ever had such a lover as the Paul of my imagination. I have prayed for him, that he might rise continually to higher and higher levels; I have thanked God for him; I have humbly prayed for more light that I might be worthy of him if I could not be equal to him. And—now? What good have my prayers brought to me; what answer have they received; what faith can remain in me? I am mocked; the words of my prayers echo back to my own ears. I hear them again and again; in the night they come back to me. But others before me have prayed, and their prayers have remained unanswered. All over the world mothers are praying for their sons, who are reeling swiftly to death and destruction; and men are praying for what they want and can never obtain. Who am I that I should expect a miracle—the conversion of this impenitent and hardened wretch? Let me accept my lot; let me suffer for loving a soul which does not exist in a form which seemed made to illustrate and adorn it.

‘But he has left a trail like the crawling of a worm. If I go to Church, the first chorister who lifts his head reminds me of the boy who posed and raised his eyes to heaven in order to make the ladies wonder at his holiness. The first preacher who grows eloquent in the pulpit reminds me of the man whose pleading was play-acting; nay, the very tears of penitence become an emotion called up at will—an emotion pleasurable and becoming. Nothing is real: everything is

acted; faith, penitence, hope, resignation—what are they all but words to which becoming gestures are fitted by the actors?

‘I do not think I shall ever see him again. Such a man cannot be allowed to live long. He will die—I am sure that he will die—and then?’

‘He has been with me—within my heart—my hero—my saint—for eight long years. The soul of my saint has never been in that body which is seized and held by a devil. When that body is laid at rest, and this devil has gone to his own place, what about myself? I have had a vision of the saintly life, more noble than is possible for mere man. So far my prayers have been heard. Let, Oh Lord, the vision remain with me, without the mocking form of the devil-seized man. Destroy the memory of the man, and make my saint the Christ indeed!’

So far she wrote; then she laid down her pen, folded the paper and laid it in her desk. She took out a little packet; it contained photographs—a sweet-faced chorister in a surplice, his lovely face lifted, his eyes filled with such a light as shone in the eyes of the Child Prophet called by the Lord; you could almost hear the pure high notes of the solo flying up to the rafters of the roof, rolling along the arches of the nave. Another photograph showed the young clergyman; he stood absorbed in thought—in holy meditation; his cassock, the lie of his hair, his pose, his soft and serious eyes, in which dwelt every kind of human sympathy and heavenly trust, all belonged to meditation. Another showed him in the pulpit, in a white surplice—his arms outspread, his eyes upturned. Margaret looked at them with a smile and a tear.

‘He is an actor,’ she said, ‘and he enjoys his part. He plays—himself.’ She threw the photographs into the fire.

She took out next a packet of letters, and turned them over. ‘They are tear-stained,’ she murmured. ‘He enjoyed his sorrows; he carefully dropped his tears on the paper. I think he enjoyed penitence even more than the sins which brought trouble upon him.’ She tore the letters up into a hundred pieces, and threw them into the fire. ‘Let me forget the sham repentance,’ she murmured, ‘just as I would forget, if I could, the sham religion. Oh, Vision of the Earthly Saint, cease—cease, at last, I pray thee, to present thyself in the form of Samuel Canning!’

Three years passed by. Nothing had come from America concerning Paul. Margaret remained single, and she kept in her flat, though she had become really rich, and might have taken larger and better rooms. People who expect visits stay in the same place. Perhaps Margaret expected a visitor.

Her expected visitor did not come. And now he never will come. After three years she received a letter from him. He wrote from a town in one of the Central States. ‘Perhaps’—the letter was written in the third person—‘Miss Cholmley may remember one whom she formerly knew as Paul Leighan. Perhaps she has quite forgotten him. If the former, she may still be interested to learn that he is flourishing as much as he had a wish to expect and more—much, very much more. He left his native country with the fixed intention of forgetting the past. He was resolved to consider the past as closed. He landed in New York with no past—only a future.

‘He went inland, to one of those settled States which few Englishmen ever visit. He wished to be free from the chance of recognition. He chose a city in which there are few or none of English extraction. He grew a beard to cover and conceal his face; he wore spectacles to conceal his eyes; and he brushed his hair differently. This done, it would take a very sharp detective to recognise him. He arrived at this city, and sat down. He made the acquaintance of an Episcopal clergyman: He was able to state a plain unvarnished tale of his own record. He became an ardent member of the congregation, and a teacher at the Sunday-school. In twelve months he was ordained a deacon—for the second time, it is true—but his past was buried and gone. A year after he secured priest’s orders. He has now a church and a full congregation, the service is admirable, the preacher is eloquent. My dear Margaret—’ the letter broke abruptly into the first person, and an appeal to herself. ‘What more could you wish? What is better for me? I have risen. In the depths I did not feel my deepness; it wanted the sunshine of prosperity to show the full degradation of that forgotten past. Now I truly know the meanings of words. I am happy. I am leading souls upwards. I am going to marry the daughter of the richest man in my church—a millionaire. Fortunately she does not pursue pleasure, but loves the saintly life. When I take her to Europe I shall bring her to see you if you will let me. You shall be my cousin. It will help me greatly to be connected with so good a family as yours. I have, of course, suppressed much of my record. Since I long since resolved to bury the past, this matters nothing.

It is gone. I am free to imagine a better, a holier, past. And for the good of the Church and the spiritual welfare of my flock I am prepared to suppress everything. The motive, dear Margaret, the end in view, excuses and allows this otherwise reprehensible deception. Your faithful friend (I have again changed my name (——)).’

‘You know the meaning of words?’ asked Margaret, bitterly. ‘Never. Shame cannot touch you; exposure cannot change you; love cannot attract you; wickedness cannot deter you; nothing can move you—nothing—nothing—except—will it happen?—a miracle. I wait.’ She laid down the letter with a sigh. ‘I wait for that miracle.’

It was the last letter but one received from Paul Leighan.

About a year afterwards another letter came to her from the United States. It was addressed in a handwriting which she did not recognise. She opened it. Two enclosures fell out. One was from Paul. It was written from a State Prison.

‘You are the only person whom I dare address,’ it began. ‘You see where I am—in what a shameful place. You ask me how I got here. I have had misfortunes: I lost my money. I lost my church. I lost my rich bride. They said things. I lost my character. I had to fly. I could get no work: I was persuaded to join—yes, I confess it—a gang of swindlers; we were detected and tried, and I am here for some years. I should not write to you but that I must tell you, friend of my happier days, that I now see and clearly understand the realities of things. I have learned at last the meanings of words which

formerly were always on my tongue without any meaning. I have remembered what you told me, that obscurity must henceforth be my life. I accept the lot. Let me, however, still hope to lead the saintly life. I see myself toiling amongst the roughest and rudest; they shall learn to love, to pity, and to revere me. As soon as I am released I mean to get back home—to England; this is a cold and cruel country. In England you will enable me to carry out the dream of my life. Temptation will no longer assail me. I am strengthened by affliction. I shall become a prophet among the humblest and lowliest; I shall never let them know my story of disgrace; I shall lead them upwards—an obscure saint of the people—among the people——’

Here the letter stopped. It was accompanied by another.

‘Madam,’—this letter was also written from the State Prison, and was signed by the governor—‘I enclose a letter which was begun by a prisoner here, but remains unfinished. He died this morning, in our hospital, of pneumonia. He expressed great penitence at the end, and I hope his penitence was sincere. His short career in this country was marked by unusual audacity in crime. He was an Episcopal clergyman of great eloquence and apparently of true religion; his spiritual appearance and conversation created for him great popularity. Then he was detected in some scandal and had to fly his town. He became a member of a company of swindlers, now broken up, who worked together and organised robbery on a large scale; he was betrayed by the jealousy of a woman in the gang. She gave evidence against him, and on his

conviction killed herself. Some of these facts are, I dare say, known to you. Perhaps you will communicate the news of his death to any others interested in him. I have only to add that the clergyman of the Episcopal Church, who attended him unto the end, was deeply moved with the fervour of his prayers, with the true penitence which he displayed, with the humility which he showed at the last consolations of the Church, and with the rapture with which he turned his dying eyes to heaven. I report his very words, as they may be some consolation to his former friends.'

Margaret laid down the letters.

'So,' she said, 'he died as he had lived, with his eyes turned up to heaven. I loved him—I loved him!' The tears rolled down her cheek. 'Oh, Heaven!' she murmured, 'I can never forget him—never! After all that he has done, I cannot forget him. I love him still. Since my Earthly Saint must needs wear the earthly form of Paul, grant that I may forget the mocking double, the man possessed with the devil, who took his place.'

PEER AND HEIRESS

I

IN the month of June there are not many travellers in Lakeland. The trippers have not yet begun to trip; the trampers have not yet begun to tramp; the coaches have not yet begun to upset; the excursion trains have not begun to collide; the rare and casual traveller will find at this sweet season, when the spring is at its best, only a stray wanderer; here and there a party of two or three young men; here and there an American family: all the year round, in the most unlikely spots—on Helvellyn in December, in Piccadilly in August—is to be found the American family. The hotels and inns at this sweet season are standing empty; the welcome accorded to the single arrival is heartfelt and real. Hospitality he receives, not paid service; the waiters—in June they are all women—smile upon him; the table groans with good things for him. At such a season, when, day after day, one traveller meets another traveller, or one party, day after day, comes upon another, halting at the same place, it is only a question of time when they begin to speak. First a smile of greeting—wrung, forced, extorted, in spite of reserve and exclusiveness—by continual arrival at the same place;

then a word or two of polite commonplace ; next, a talk at the *table d'hôte* ; then an acquaintance which promises to be pleasant ; then the discovery of common friends ; lastly, perhaps a lifelong friendship.

The following is the story of two parties travelling through Lakeland in the month of June, and how they met at the same hotels and at the same sights and places, and how they presently began to speak to each other, with what happened afterwards. How deeply the story-teller—if you come to think of it—is beholden to what happened afterwards !

The first party—I call them the first party because they were first in the field—contained two young men, named respectively Philip Ainslie and James—or Jem—Sevenoke. They were great friends because they were totally unlike each other in every respect. Philip Ainslie was a man of much intellectual activity, who had taken a very good degree, and was now a fellow and lecturer of his college, and Jem Sevenoke was a man who lay on his back and talked ; and as for intellectual activity, he only read just enough to get through. Ainslie was a tall and rather thin man, with a quick, eager look, while his friend was sleek and fat, and showed his laziness in every movement and every limb, by the way in which he took root in an easy chair, even by the droop of his eyes, which were too lazy to open wide. Ainslie had ambitions—as yet vague, but already glorious. Scholarship claimed him. He was lecturer in his college ; he might become Tutor and even Master ; he might become Professor in the University, or even Public Orator. The three are drawbacks to the University life. Most men who have ‘ gone down ’ afterwards

rejoice that they did go down ; most men who stay up regret in their declining years that they did not make up their minds to struggle in the arena and share the common lot. One may now marry, but there is still a flavour of the life monastic about the modern Oxford and Cambridge. Moreover, there is the pressure of the younger men who are pitiless towards an aged man of thirty, and think that he of forty ought no longer to cumber the earth. On the other hand, there are greater and nobler prizes outside : a good many University men have found this out : there is the House of Commons, where a scholar who can speak and who knows things may speedily work his way. Such an one may become Irish Secretary, or Home Secretary, or anything you please. And a good many young University men at this moment are considering whether it were not better to surrender college posts and wearisome lectures to undergraduates, and to make a bid for these prizes. Ainslie was one of these young men. His friend, who was rich, frankly owned that there was nothing which the world could offer which would tempt him to take off his coat, go down into the arena, and fight with other men to get it. To sum up his character, it is sufficient to say that his friends all called him Jem.

These two young men had been at Ambleside a week when they first struck the other party. The meeting was in this wise. On the last morning but one of their stay, while they waited breakfast in the coffee-room, the door opened and two young ladies entered. They were both young : they walked in quietly, took chairs at the other end of the long table, and began to talk. They were alone, but they ap-

peared perfectly self-possessed. Perhaps they had a mother, or an elderly companion of some kind, upstairs. The two men, glancing furtively, observed that they were not only young but pretty—really pretty. One of them, indeed, was a most desirable maiden, quite of the queenly kind; her features regular, her shapely head classical, her abundant hair a deep brown, her eyes a deep blue, her expression full of reserve and dignity. Perhaps she was cold in appearance—it is a fault always forgiven in a girl by the man to whom she has ceased to show that coldness. The other girl was of a more frivolous type, a smaller girl—a mundane girl—a middle-class girl—a girl to whom no one would attribute absolute perfection, not even her lover: not a queen at all: a girl who laughed and chattered and read out bits of the guide-book—yet a girl of great qualities to those who love such maidens. They talked quietly but gaily, and without the least consciousness of the presence of strangers. Indeed, they were as little conscious of strangers as the Speaker of the House of Commons.

As soon as their breakfast was over, they rose and left the room.

‘Americans,’ said Jem, when the door closed. ‘And as good as they make ’em, I think. I like them, old man, fair to outward hue as maidens all should be.’

‘Travelling alone, apparently,’ Ainslie replied. ‘If they like it, why not? I suppose they know very well how to take care of themselves.’

As for the taller girl,’ said Jem, ‘she is just lovely. She ought to be kept here and made to marry somebody—you, if you like. She can’t marry me, because I believe I am engaged.’ He sighed. ‘I suppose we

shall see no more of them. That's the worst of these show places. You meet the most desirable girls in the world ; you see them for a moment ; you wonder where they come from ; then you go different ways. We are like flies under the shade of a hedge. Come ! let us go and have a pipe under Stock Gill Force.'

This waterfall, as everybody knows, is ten minutes' walk or so from the hotel. There was only one objection to their taking the morning tobacco in that interesting spot. It was the presence of the American girls, who were sketching there. So they went up higher.

That was how it began. In the afternoon they were walking home by way of Rydal Water, and they passed the girls gazing upon the lake. At dinner they sat at the same table with them, but again at different ends ; and though the men talked in whispers, the girls chattered gaily as if no one was present but themselves. Perhaps no one quite approaches the American girl in sublime unconsciousness of the outer world. Next day the two men left Ambleside and went over to Grasmere. At luncheon they found the two girls also present. So they had come to Grasmere as well. After luncheon the men started for Easedale Tarn, which is a roughish climb. From Easedale they went on to Stickle Tarn. On their way back they found the girls at Easedale, sitting beside the cottage where they keep the ginger-beer in August. This time, as they passed, they lifted their hats. That was the first step—the way the acquaintance began. In the evening they sat at dinner together, at the same end of the table—in fact, the men stood in the windows till the girls were

seated, and then taking their chairs opposite, asked permission to sit there. This was obviously the second step. They talked during dinner about the lakes and the places yet to be seen and the places already seen, and about Hartley Coleridge and Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau, and the usual things. And they learned that the name of one girl—the regal or imperial girl—was Nell, or Nellie, and that the name of the other was Mamie. After dinner, in the smoking-room, Jem rang the bell and called for the visitors' book. It told them very little. One girl signed her name as Eleanor Ingress, Clifton, Vermont, and the other as Mary A. Maldon, Boston, Mass.

‘There is not much information in names and addresses,’ said Jem. ‘I defy anybody to guess at anything from this. A good substantial tombstone, now, will tell an imaginative man enough for him to make out a whole life.’

‘They are evidently travelling together ; they are, I suppose, emancipated females ; our countrywomen would use their freedom with more self-consciousness. These girls are free, and yet are not ashamed.’

In the morning the girls were not at breakfast. They had breakfasted early, and had gone out for the day. The men, with a little disappointment, sat down by themselves. After breakfast they started for the daily walk. It led them to the broad summit of Helvellyn. There, to their great surprise, they found the girls resting after their long climb. Then they laughed : it was too absurd to be always meeting wherever they went ; and then they all came down the mountain together. That evening they sat in

the coffee-room after dinner, and the men took a boat and rowed the girls upon the lake in the twilight; and when they came back they fell to talking about poetry and poets. These girls knew and could quote immense quantities of poetry; they had catholic tastes: they could not see why Longfellow was not in the same line with Browning, and they talked familiarly about American bards of whom the Greek scholar had never heard.

‘Nell,’ said the girl called Mamie, ‘this is the first evening I have really enjoyed since we landed. I was wondering whether all Americans travel through the old country as we have done, without speaking to a single Englishman. Lots do, I am sure, and then go home and abuse England because they had no letters of introduction.’

‘Yes,’ replied her companion, ‘it has been a pleasant change for us. They seem well-informed young men. I suppose they will be gone to-morrow. It will be something to say that we have actually talked with two English gentlemen for a whole evening without any introduction.’

‘I’ve found out their names. The tall thin man, who sits up straight and talks like a book, is named Philip Ainslie, and he lives at some college in Cambridge—not our Cambridge. He’s a Professor, I suppose. The other is named James Sevenoke, and he lives at something or other Hall, Warwickshire.’

‘I thought that one of them—Mr. Ainslie, I suppose, if that is his name—talked like a man of culture. It is pleasant to think that we have been conversing with a scholar.’

‘Yes, he is very superior indeed—insular, I sup-

pose, like all the people here, about the literature of his own country. I wonder if he ever read Howells on that subject. That would make him consider his ways a bit. However, he saw you colour up when he said something about our hundred-and-twenty Sapphos, and he stopped. These islanders are not without some perception, my dear.'

'Mamie, don't say "these islanders." Let us leave our foolish Republican superiority behind us. They are gentlemen and scholars. Do we want more? Could we get more at home? Think, dear, can a school-teacher like me always hope, in the country town where she may have to work, for the society of such gentlemen and scholars as these.'

'They are also, my dear, young men with a well-developed sense of feminine loveliness, especially—no, I won't say it. Good night, Nell.'

'I wonder,' said Jem, in the smoking-room, 'what those girls are at home. They talk like young ladies. They've got parlour manners, to quote an American novelist; they dress all right; they behave all right; the tall one has got on an invisible cestus of long sharp pins; I kinder felt it—excuse my dropping into Americanese; they go about alone. What do their brothers say? What is the opinion of the old man? Perhaps they don't ask the old man's leave. I suppose they are rolling in dollars.'

'At all events, they are well-bred, well-read, and cultured girls,' said Philip. 'I should like to spend another evening with them: I am sure that there must be things in that girl's head which one could get at with a little more talk.'

‘For my own part,’ said Jem, ‘I feel as if their companionship would enliven the very emptiest hotel in Lakeland. Ask them to stay on here a long while, and we will stay too. I’ve got nothing in the world to do. I will stay five hundred years if they will stay too.’

‘Then you have decided on your plans?’

It was at breakfast next morning.

‘We have not very much time left,’ Eleanor replied. ‘We have to catch the steamer of the 25th from Liverpool. That leaves us only ten days. We think of going on to Derwentwater to-day. Then we shall go down Borrowdale to Rosthwaite Hotel, and over Sty Head Pass to Wastwater. After that we shall get back somehow to Windermere, and so by train to Liverpool.’

‘Curious,’ Jem smiled plaintively, as becomes one who vainly searches into the reasons of coincidence. ‘Our own little tour was laid down on exactly the same lines. We shall therefore hope to meet again while you are in the Lakes.’

In fact, it was very remarkable that, exactly an hour after the ladies had alighted at the door of the Derwentwater Hotel, these two young men arrived at the same place.

At dinner they met as old friends, and without the least surprise. After dinner they took a boat as they had done at Grasmere, and the men rowed gently across the lake, which is narrow at this point, and so in and out among the islands, and they all reminded each other, from the guide-books, of the stories told about these islands, and called upon each other to admire the softness and the warmth of the scenery

the splendour of the setting sun, the hues of the west, the colour of lake and sky and coppice and hill. Finally, when the day was quite done and mists began to rise and the girls began to shiver, they rowed home again.

They met again at Rosthwaite, in Borrowdale ; they walked together over Sty Head Pass, and had a little picnic on the top ; they all stayed at Wastdale Inn. And by this time they were companions in travel—comrades—talking freely on all kinds of subjects, yet always with the knowledge that the thing was too good to last. Presently they awoke to the knowledge that out of the ten days six were gone. Only four remained. On the fourth the girls would have to be at Liverpool. Only four days !

The young men, being gentlemen, were careful to treat the girls so that there should be no suspicion of anything but acquaintance, pleasant and entertaining ; they kept up the appearance of distance. Yet the talk grew by process of exhaustion more familiar and even more personal, and they began naturally to separate into pairs.

One evening—it was the sixth day, they were still at Wastdale Inn—Philip Ainslie, with Eleanor, strolled about the banks of the wild lake lying under the black screes, while the other two sat in the hotel. They talked in pairs. Something moved the young man, who was usually reticent, to speak about himself. He said that sometimes he desired no other life than that of the scholar : he did not wish at those times to leave the University ; the arena of the world had no attractions for him, nor did he wish for its honours ; but that at other times he was urged to take up a political

career. And so on. Not to want position, power, a name, is the talk of the young man before he feels his strength; many clever young men feel it: some of them go on under the influence of such feeling so long that it becomes too late to change. Then they regard other men, of their own time, climbing the ladder of name and fame, and they sigh, looking round their narrow college rooms.

What Eleanor said matters nothing. She was interested: she was sympathetic.

In the little sitting-room of the inn were Jem Sevenoke and Mamie; he lay back in the softest chair and listened while the girl talked.

‘You know,’ said the girl after one of the intervals of silence, ‘when we came over I thought we should see at every railway station a haughty lord, with all you people bowing and cringing before him. I pictured myself walking past him with a freezing stare—so—to show the superior American. Yet we haven’t seen a single lord or a single cringe.’

‘Lords are like rattlesnakes in your country. If you want to see them, you have to go to the places where they most congregate.’

‘I confess I should like to see a lord and to talk with one, just for once, if only to see if lords are better educated than other people.’

It was at this point that the Spirit of Mischief entered Jem’s head and whispered words: ‘Go on—make her believe—see what comes of it—startle her!’

He sat upright with a visible effort, because he was so lazy. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘if that is all you want, I believe I can gratify you. Only it’s rather mean—he would not like it—I am afraid you would let him know

—it was quite understood that no one was to know. However, if you will promise not to let him know that you know what I know——’

‘This is getting mixed,’ said Mamie.

‘It is because you are enticing me to do a wrong thing. Well, then, the fact is that my friend, Philip Ainslie—as he calls himself—is really a member of the Upper House.’

‘A member of the Upper House? Do you mean that Mr. Ainslie is a lord?’

‘That is what I mean,’ Jem nodded with decision. ‘Only, as he doesn’t like the style and title and the worry of it, he travels about in this way, incog.’

‘Oh! Good gracious! Now I am pleased! I really am! What’s his name—his real name?’

‘Philip, Viscount Maddingley.’ Jem took the first name that occurred to him. ‘One of Edward the Third’s creations. Ancestors said to have been Saxon gentlemen, like the man in “Ivanhoe.” The title’—he went on, piling it up—‘survived the Wars of the Roses, which were fatal to so many peerages. One of his ancestors was beheaded by Henry VIII., another fell at Naseby on the side of the King, another was beheaded by Cromwell, another by Charles II. at the Restoration, one for the Rebellion of 1715, one for that of 1745, and one—the last—for high treason at the time of the French Revolution.’

‘If you come to ancestors,’ said the girl, ‘all the real old English families are over in America.’

‘Just so. Only the younger sons are left here. Titles, you see, always descend through the younger sons in order to allow the elder sons to emigrate to the States.’

‘Oh! But this is lovely,’ the girl clapped her hands and laughed. ‘And to look at and to talk to, he is no better—not a bit better—than a Professor of an American college.’

‘Don’t you find him distinguished in appearance? Don’t you find old nobility established in the curve of the upper lip and the droop of the eyelid and the point of the ear?’

‘Well, if you press me for an answer, I don’t. There are plenty of young Americans who look far more aristocratic than that. Not but that he’s a pleasant fellow, and well behaved, I suppose. But, oh!’ she wrung her hands with a kind of despair, ‘ought we to go on talking to him? Has he got any character? Are not all the British aristocracy profligates?’

‘All but this one, I believe. You may safely trust yourselves with Philip Ainslie—Viscount Maddingley.’

‘Is he enormously rich?’

‘Fifty—twenty—years ago that question might have been put. At present nobody is enormously rich out of your flourishing country. It is only in North America where all the people are millionaires and all the girls are heiresses.’

Then it was that the Spirit of Mischief passed over from one head to the other. He got into Mamie’s head; he made her laugh again; he caused her eyes to sparkle and her lips to tremble. He whispered to her: ‘Tell him; see what will come of it. Startle him; see what the noble lord will do.’

‘Well,’ she said slowly, ‘we are not all millionaires, at all events. I am not one; that is very certain. But—well, it was not to be told to anybody;

I am sure she would not like it to be known. It was quite understood that nobody was to know. However, if you will promise not to let her know that you know what I know——’

‘You are imitating me,’ said Jem. ‘I was rather mixed.’

‘Yes; what was it you said? It is because you are enticing me to a wrong thing. Oh! but there is no great harm in it. Everybody at home knows it. Nell is a millionaire, if you like. It was—it was bicarbonate of potash did it, I believe. Nobody—certainly not Nell, because she never inquires—knows within a few millions how rich she is. Fifty millions it is, if it is a red cent, and the pile growing *and* growing *and* growing—all the time.’

‘Oh!’ Jem sank back with a groan. ‘What a dreadful thing it must be to have so much and to be able to spend so little!’

‘I told you this, Mr. Sevenoke,’ Mamie added with some dignity, ‘because, although you and your friend may wish to sail under false colours, and pretend to be college Professors when you are only peers, you shall not be able to say that we did so too.’

II

‘NELL’—this, again, was after retirement to the upper chambers—‘I’ve made a most wonderful discovery. It is about Mr. Ainslie, your friend.’

‘Not my friend any more than yours, Mamie.’ But she blushed a rosy red and looked more beautiful than ever.

Mamie tossed her head. ‘My friend, then. Well,

my dear, and what do you think I have found out about my friend ?’

‘I don’t know; what is there to find out? He is a fellow and lecturer of his college, he has a little money of his own, he has been asked to go into Parliament; but he cannot make up his mind to give up scholarship.’

‘Oh! a little money of his own; I wonder what he calls little. Go into Parliament! Why, Nell, he is in Parliament if he likes. He has got a great country house; he is a peer—not a Professor at all—a peer of the realm, baron, earl, viscount—I don’t know what.’

‘Oh! but he cannot be. He would have told me if that were so.’

‘Mr. Sevenoke told me. His name is Lord Maddenford, or some such title. But he doesn’t like cringing, I suppose, and so he goes about under a false name. He may be a college Professor, but he is also a peer.’

Nell sat down with heightened colour. ‘Oh!’ she said. ‘And after all he has told me! He never gave me the least suspicion. Not that he actually *said* that he was not a lord—I never thought—perhaps I supposed that lords go about with stars on their coats; yet he should have told me. Oh! I am so sorry! I am so sorry! Now I feel that everything is spoiled. I shall be full of constraint.’

‘Don’t show it, Nell, that’s all. What? Are we not two citizens of the greatest country that the world ever saw? Shall we feel constraint because we are talking to the tenth transmitter of a foolish face?’

‘Mr. Ainslie’s face is not foolish. I am sorry, Mamie, because, somehow—don’t you think?—this discovery will spoil the recollection of the journey we had under the acquaintance of two young gentlemen who behaved to us with as great courtesy as we could get at home. And they have deceived us as to their position. He talked so well and was so sympathetic and so full of ideas. And he was only a lord all the time! Well’—she turned her face, which was flushed, and her eyes, which were hard, to her friend—‘otherwise, it matters nothing; what can it matter? Nothing at all—to us—what he is——’

‘It matters nothing, Nell, as you say.’ But her face was troubled, and she looked curiously at her companion.

Miss Eleanor Ingress stood up and went on with her hair-brushing.

‘I do think,’ she said, from the Republican point of view, ‘that it must be the most dreadful thing possible—the most soul-destroying thing—for a man to be a lord. To be separated from other men—to be treated as a person of consideration on account of a title, though he may be quite young—too young to have proved himself worthy of any consideration whatever—and as a person worthy of respect, though he may be a contemptible profligate.’

‘That part of it is all right,’ said Mamie. ‘Mr. Sevenoke says that he is not a profligate—the only peer, he says, who is not. How can a country continue to exist, Nell, when the whole of its Upper Chamber is composed of open profligates?’

‘Rank!’ meditated Eleanor. ‘Why should people respect rank? A title makes no difference: it cannot

give brains or genius or strength or comeliness. How long before this great people rid themselves of rank ? ’

‘ I have discovered,’ said Jem, in the smoking-room, ‘ the reason why those two girls are so independent. It is much the same reason that used to make a prince become a law unto himself. The reason is that one of them is horribly, incredibly, Americanly rich. She is rich after the fashion of a country which only knows extremes. Fifty millions is her figure—I suppose it’s dollars—ten millions sterling. Five hundred thousand pounds a year—what’s that ? About five shillings a minute. Yet she goes about in common conveyances just like you and me.’

‘ Which is the millionaire ? ’

‘ The tall girl—the beautiful girl—the queenly girl—the Eleanor Ingress girl.’

‘ Oh ! I am sorry.’ Philip Ainslie changed colour. ‘ I don’t know why—of course it makes no difference. We have only known her a few days. I thought her interesting and clever. She did not talk as if she was rich—rather the reverse, I thought. Well—it doesn’t matter, of course—it is only a chance acquaintance.’

‘ Only a chance acquaintance ? ’ echoed Jem, looking up curiously.

‘ I do think,’ Philip went on, ‘ that it must be the most dreadful thing to be so horribly rich—to be separated from the working world—to be treated with consideration on account of your money, though you are of no account at all. Money ! Why should people respect money ? Wealth cannot give brains or genius

or anything. How long before the Americans give up the odious worship of money ? ’

III

NEXT day the party was broken up. A telegram was brought from the nearest station calling Jem home at once. When the girls came down to breakfast he was gone.

The departure of one member of a party of four may sadden the rest, but it ought not to bring constraint upon them. A new and curious constraint fell upon all three. The young man talked about the scenery and Lakeland, as if he was only just beginning conversation with strangers seated at the same table. The girls played up to him. The talk languished ; they became silent. Presently the girls got up and left the room. Ainslie did not ask them what their plans might be. When they were gone he seized his hat and strode forth.

‘ This,’ he said, ‘ has got to be ended. It shall not be said that I married for money. She has deceived me. She led me on to tell her about myself and my little ambitions. She answered me as if she was perfectly poor ; she talked about the privilege of having a journey through the whole country—the privilege !—and with all her millions ! Well, all I’ve got to do now is to get away as quickly as I can.’ He swung along the road repeating these words or their synonyms to himself as he went. ‘ And this morning,’ he went on, ‘ she came downstairs as cold and distant as if she had never spoken to me at all. She means, I suppose, to go home and tell her friends how an

Englishman tried to win her for her money, and how she put him down.'

He walked all day long—angry and hurt, and nursing his anger. He returned late—after the dinner hour—tired and hungry, and still angry—if possible more angry because he felt now how far he had gone with the girl. The more he thought of her beauty and her sweetness and her quick sympathy the more angry he became.

The dinner was over: he took some food, not caring what it was. The girls were out somewhere.

At nine o'clock the door opened and Mamie came in. He was standing at the window gazing at nothing in gloomy abstraction.

'I hope you have had a pleasant day, Mr. Ainslie,' she said, standing before him with her hands crossed. He made no answer for a moment. 'Oh! I will call you anything else you like,' she added.

'I have—why should I not have a pleasant day?'

'Since you have—— But, Mr. Ainslie, there have been—things kept back—I will not say misrepresentations. We have had a very pleasant fortnight—we are going on to Liverpool to-morrow—we shall never meet again. I suppose—you, a great man, will not think any more about two humble American girls—if any American girls can be rightly called humble—don't you think that, after such a pleasant fortnight, it would be well if we could part friends? I don't mind about the—the misunderstanding—I am quite willing that we should all take each other for what we seem: you a plain English gentleman, and we plain American girls. Let us part in kindness.'

'In kindness? Yes—why not?'

‘Eleanor is walking outside. Go and speak to her. If we have made your tour in this beautiful country any happier, go and tell her so. She has been your companion all along.’

She went out as she had come in. He looked after her for a moment, then he obeyed and went out. Eleanor was standing alone, looking up the valley which stretched in splendour up into the hills under the sky still full of sunset splendour.

‘I hear,’ said Philip, awkwardly, ‘that you are going to Liverpool to-morrow?’

‘Yes. Did Mamie tell you?’

‘It is our last evening, then, Miss Ingress.’ He spoke with some return to the old frankness. ‘Let me thank you for your great, your very great kindness in allowing two strangers to make your acquaintance.’

‘Nay, Mr. Ainslie’—she turned her frank eyes and spoke with her sweet seriousness. ‘The kindness was yours—and your friend’s—in helping us to see and enjoy this place. We shall take home with us the memory of these days.’

At this point Philip became incoherent. ‘I begin to think,’ he said, ‘that it is a mistake to hide things. I mean that mere acquaintance cannot become—friendship—if anything is hidden. When they are found out coldness must follow, don’t you think?’

‘Indeed, yes, Mr. Ainslie. Therefore, I shall try to think that nothing ever was found out. The college Professor will remain to me just what he described himself.’

‘Why not?’ He wondered afterwards what she meant. ‘And for me, the young lady who glorified

this time will remain for me—all my life long—the girl I took her to be—the girl I shall always believe her to be.’

He stooped, took her hand, kissed it, and left her. And she wondered then and long afterwards what he could have meant. Presently she went in, and sought her own room. Here Mamie found her, and there were traces of tears in her eyes.

‘Nell, dear, did he say he was sorry? Did he say he was horrid to make us believe—what he did?’

‘He talked—I don’t know—as if we had been hiding something—as if it was our fault. Good-night, Mamie.’

Mamie went to her own room with a guilty heart. ‘He is proud,’ she said. ‘He thinks that she is so rich that even his income is small beside it. Oh! It’s all my doing—all my doing. In the morning I will set him right.’

But in the morning he was gone.

IV

Two years later, again in the leafy month of June, when Piccadilly and Regent Street are full of Americans, Mr. Jem Sevenoke was strolling quietly along with the throng when he saw, looking into a shop window, a lady whose face he remembered. He stood still, waiting for her to turn. She did this in a few moments.

‘Why, if it isn’t Mr. Sevenoke!’ she cried.

‘It is, Miss Mamie!’

‘Oh! I am so glad. This is my husband. I am

no longer Miss Mamie. John, this is Mr. Sevenoke, who was with us in the Lakes two years ago. Well, now, Mr. Sevenoke, this is a real pleasure. Come home with me—we are in Half-Moon Street, close by—and I will give you some tea, and we will talk. John,’ she addressed her husband, ‘will you go and walk about somewhere—and don’t buy anything—while I take Mr. Sevenoke home for a long talk, all about that beautiful time in the Lakes? You needn’t come back before dinner-time, you know.’

‘And so,’ said Mamie, after half-an-hour’s talk, ‘he wasn’t a lord after all. Oh! Mr. Sevenoke, how could you?’

‘And so,’ said Jem, ‘she wasn’t a millionaire at all, but a school teacher. Oh! Miss Mamie, how could you? I ask you again—how could you?’

‘And all this trouble because, mind, Nell was taken with him from the beginning, and, if I ever read any such signs in my life, he was more than taken with Nell. Gracious goodness! Could a man who wasn’t a stock and a stone not be taken with Nellie Ingress? And it was all stopped and broken short off just because of our mischief! Mr. Sevenoke, how could you?’

‘Well, if you come to that——’

‘I wish to come to that. Where is the man?’

‘At Cambridge, lecturing and examining and writing. Where is the girl?’

‘Teaching school in Canada. Now I shall write to him and confess all—everything. I won’t put more on your back than you deserve, but I must confess everything. Why have you never told him?’

‘Well, you see, I never thought of it. No one

ever told me what had happened. He never said anything; I didn't expect these tragic consequences.'

'Idiot! Stock and stone!' Mamie laughed. 'You must have been a stock and a stone not to see that they only wanted a word or an opportunity. Now I think of it, you were a stock and a stone, because you didn't even make love to me.'

V

IN a little Canadian town within the sound of Niagara Nellie Ingress taught school at a salary of six hundred dollars. She had held the appointment for two years, and, I believe, to the complete satisfaction of the boys and girls whom she taught. In the town she was greatly respected by reason of her knowledge, which was believed to be profound and encyclopædic knowledge. Many young men also respected her on account of her singular beauty. But she was cold—she repelled their advances one by one. They retired, and addressed themselves to lowlier maidens, with whom they were one by one successful. Happy is the man who finds his mate!

It was a warm afternoon in September, about six and near sunset. The cows were marching home in silent procession, each stopping orderly and responsible before her own gate. The broad street, with its planks for footway, was edged by small wooden houses each in its garden, where the tomatoes grew luxuriantly and the vines climbed up the walls and the apple-trees were laden with their golden harvest. Children played and ran about the street. One or two of the houses were general stores. There

was an hotel ; there was the church ; and there was the school. In fact, it was just a quiet, secluded town such as one may find by the hundred all over America.

In the garden, before a white wooden house of two storeys, sat Eleanor Ingress, school over for the day. A book was in her lap, but she was not reading ; her arms were thrown back to support her head, but her thoughts were far away. She was in a boat upon a silver lake, bordered with tall woods and reflecting mighty hills. Above was the translucent sky of mid-summer twilight ; before her sat a young man, eager, bright of face—oh ! so far away—so long ago—so long ago. Yet it lived—every hour of that time—in her brain. There fell upon her ears the sound of wheels. It brought her back to the little Canadian town. She sat up and looked round. What was it that she saw that turned her cheek first white and then red—that made her spring to her feet—that held her motionless ?

The young man who jumped out of the carriage had driven over from Cliftonville, which is Canadian for Niagara. He told the man to wait, and looked up and down the road. Then he caught sight of the girl in the garden, and he ran to meet and greet her.

She recovered her self-command. She stepped to the garden-gate and lifted the latch. ‘Oh ! Mr. Ainslie,’ she said, with the old sweet seriousness that he remembered so well, ‘you here ? That is—if I am still to call you Mr. Ainslie.’

‘Why not ? I have no other name. There has been a misunderstanding. Foolish things, I have only just heard, were said in jest and taken in earnest.’

‘What things ?’

‘They told you that I was—oh ! the folly of it !—a peer—a lord—a viscount. I have hardly the patience to tell you. Of course you believed—you could not know—and they told me that you were a great millionaire—a rich heiress—which I believed, and—and——’

‘I—a millionaire ? Did you not know that we were two school-teachers, who had just enough money to take us over to the old country and back ? Oh ! but we should have told you !’

‘I have only just found out’—he spoke in gasps ; he was eager to tell all. [In this way fond lovers hurry over the finest situations and spoil them. They do not slur them ; such a situation cannot be slurred ; but they spoil them.] ‘Your friend—what is her name ?—wrote me a letter about it and confessed her part. Jem Sevenoke wrote too, and confessed his. You are only rich in your loveliness and in your heart and in your soul. I came away at once—as soon as I heard—I came to see you—Nellie—I came to see you. I am nothing but what I told you—a simple college lecturer.’

He held her hand in his and said no more. Never even told her that he loved her. Again, the rushing of a fine situation. ‘Oh !’ she murmured, ‘to me you shall always be Earl and Baron and my noble Lord !’

All this, you see, happened because two young men met two young ladies at breakfast at the inn called The Salutation, Ambleside.

THE EQUAL WOMAN

I

‘You were saying?’ The long man in the low chair stretched out his legs and threw his head back.

‘When you ceased to listen,’ replied the other man coldly, ‘we were speaking of the Decay of Woman.’

‘Ah! yes; the Decay of Woman. Man, I believe, is also in Decay.’

‘It is an Age of Decadence. Everything—everything—is in Decay.’

The place was a club smoking-room; the time, evening. The man in the chair was the well-known Archie Carew, one of those men who seem to know everything, and to try everything, and who come out of everything when they have found out the trick of it. He is now reported to work miracles by means of the Hypnotic Mystery, and is said by some—but perhaps this is a false report—to be one of the inner ring in Esoteric Buddhism. He lay back in the chair contemplating his companion with eyes of curiosity and amusement, perhaps contempt. The man who talked was a little man, small of head and of limb, with sloping shoulders and narrow chest; his features pinched, or, as he would have put it,

fine ; his face smooth ; his hair long and parted at the side so as to take advantage of a premature thinning which lent an apparent nobility to the brow ; he wore a brown velvet coat and a crimson scarf. Of course he had a *pince-nez*. This was Mr. Raymond Ridge—he preferred the name without the prefix or title. He had quite recently been presented to London by one of the two Universities which every year send up one or two young gentlemen who are going to set the world right at last in matters of art and literature. Formerly they were men of Geist, then of Light and Leading, then of Culture. Now they are men of the Higher Criticism. Whether they write or whether they talk, it is always on the assumption of a quite superior taste possessed by themselves, and unknown to the popular practitioner. Theirs is the school, theirs are the performances of the Future. Now and then they are men of ability, who presently drop their affectations and settle down with the rest to produce work as good as in them lies. Sometimes they can do nothing except write their Higher Criticism, until that is snuffed out by somebody newer still.

Mr. Raymond Ridge was in the first stage of promise. He was understood, by those who believed in him, to be going to produce something really wonderful ; he was incubating a Marvel—it was not known of what kind. Meantime he spoke much and often of Decay ; he was oppressed by sadness in contemplating the universal Decay.

‘The Decay of Woman,’ repeated Archie.

‘It is part of the general Decay. Man is decaying. Art is decayed. Literature is dead. Poetry is dying. Woman decays.’ He spoke in a high

and rasping voice, and with the appearance of confidence.

‘Oh!’ answered his friend.

‘Woman,’ continued the Leader of the Future with immense profundity, and speaking in capitals, ‘is the Partner of Man; she is Content to be no Higher than her Husband. Without Woman Man is incomplete. Love causes Life——’

‘I have heard something like that before.’

‘Pardon me. Let my Thought develop. Without Love there is no perfect Life. Love is the Flower. Love beautifies, inspires, stimulates, suggests. Love can only exist in equal natures; in Perception, equal; in Elevation of Soul, equal; in Art and Æsthetics, equal; in Sympathies, equal. Without Equality there can be no true Love; without the Equality of Perfection no Perfect Love. I say this in order that you may understand that I am no decrifier of Woman. This is, in fact, my Creed. It is, perhaps—who knows?—my Message!’ The voice dropped. ‘My Message! Man gropes blindly in the dark to find his Message! Few men find it.’

‘If that is your Message you might have found it in the nearest phonograph.’

‘When I do find it’—the Leader spoke as if he had not heard those words—‘I shall deliver it to the world in triumphant tones’—his high voice cracked. ‘It may be, I say—it should be—the Message of the Perfect Love. I dream,’ he spread his arms and tossed back his hair, ‘I pant, I yearn—for the Perfect Love.’

‘I see. In order to realise this dream you natu-

rally want to find the Perfect Woman.' Archie's eyes twinkled as he looked upon the little Prophet of the Future. 'The Perfect Woman alone,' he went on with grave voice, 'can give you the Perfect Love.'

'Say rather,' the other corrected him, with becoming modesty, 'the Equal Woman—the Sister Pulse and the Answering Soul—the Woman who will give aspiration for aspiration, thought for thought. Love will do the rest—Love will make her Perfect.'

'I hope that she will become Perfect before she loses her beauty. Women, poor things! have so brief a space. You are then in quest of this paragon?'

'I am. The search saddens me as much as—say a visit to the Royal Academy or the perusal of a new novel.'

'I infer that, instead of finding a paragon, you find illusions destroyed. But what is the matter with the girl of the period? For my own part, I am forty-three years of age; but for the last five and twenty years I have been quite contented with the girl of the period.' Everybody, in fact, knew so much of Archie. 'To me she is always fresh, lovely, engaging, and delightful. To your more critical and younger eyes she is——'

'She is soulless.' He continued to speak in capitals. 'She loves the earthly, the commonplace, the conventional. She is a Slave to Fashion—which is the senseless repetition of old changes; to Society—which is the gathering of the soulless; even to Feasting—fancy Beatrice feasting! She pretends to understand Art; she crowds the Private View and bleats; she looks at a Leighton with greater pleasure than a Burne Jones; she prefers an air of

Mendelssohn to all Wagner; and in Literature—you will hardly believe it—she admires—actually admires—Rudyard Kipling!’

‘Dear! dear!’ murmured the other man. ‘Sad, most sad!’

‘She echoes—she follows—she obeys. She has ceased to lead.’

‘My friend, with these views of contemporary womanhood you will scarcely find that paragon. Yet there are men who find the modern girl charming. They say that in physique she is immensely superior to her predecessor.’

‘Does one want an athlete?’ Certainly he hardly looked the ideal husband for an athlete.

‘That she knows a great deal more; that she is certainly not silly; that she takes an intelligent interest in everything that concerns the men of her own set; that in her accomplishments she is more thorough——’

‘Spare me. These are the commonplaces of her equals. You, and such as you, must not say such things. Thus cry the Soulless to the Soulless. But for us—for us, there is the craving for a higher happiness. We have seen a Heaven beyond their gaze. We would sit together, each with his Queen and Mistress beside him, in that Heaven.’

‘Ridge’—the use of the surname showed that the two men were not intimate; with his friends of the Higher Criticism it was Raymond—‘Ridge’—he sat up and laid his hand upon the other’s shoulder—‘you want a woman specially made for you; that’s what you want. Now, this interests me. I should like to help you.’

‘What can you do?’ asked the Child of that Higher Criticism mournfully.

‘I might do more than you think. Come now; let me try.’ He rose slowly, and stood towering over the little critic, a grand giant of a man. ‘Let me see now what manner of woman you desire. You shall define her. First, a lovely soul demands a lovely setting. She must be tall, of course?’

‘Of course.’ Yet he had explained that he wanted the Equal Woman.

‘And she must have a good figure. Not a bending, willowy reed of a girl, but the generous proportions of Venus.’

‘Say, of Aphrodite.’

‘I beg your pardon. Certainly, of Aphrodite. You would have a grand woman physically, endowed with the charms of Helen of Troy. As for details, her head should be large, her forehead low but broad, her eyebrows straight rather than arched—do I follow your thought?—her large eyes of a deep blue——’

‘Almost purple.’

‘Almost purple, the colour in which seems to dwell all wisdom and all love; her cheek ample, her nose straight and delicate; her hair a dark, warm brown, soft to the touch and abundant; her lips not thin, but full and sensitive; her chin round; her hands and feet not too small, but in just proportion to her stature. Her voice should be full and musical, not too low, yet not reedy in quality. Is that your ideal?’

‘Externally.’

‘I thought so,’ the speaker laughed. ‘We now come to the accomplishments and the Arts.’

‘To the Culture, in fact. To the Realities.’

‘You would have her not only skilful on one or more instruments of music——’

The Poet interrupted. ‘The Inexpressible can sometimes be reached by Tone.’

‘But also she should sing well and be Mistress of the Science of Music. Also you would have her not only able to paint in oil or water, but educated in the history of that Art—a critic who, before a Botticelli——’

‘Should feel the rapture of the work.’

‘She should be a poet.’

‘At least one who can appreciate the Higher Poetry.’

‘She should be a good talker, one to lead, to maintain, to stimulate the conversation; witty without spite; humorous yet always delicate; sympathetic; able to draw out the best in every one of her guests.’

‘All these qualities—all,’ said Raymond the Leader, ‘my Mistress must possess. Otherwise, how could she be my mistress?’

‘Lastly, in learning you would have her as well taught as—as, in fact, yourself. She should know Latin and Greek Literature, French, German, Italian. And all this learning, all these accomplishments she should carry gracefully. Of course she would dress with taste beyond and above the fashion of the day. Her temper, her disposition, should be as lovely as her mind. She should be the leader of women among women, and the queen of women among men. Then she will be your mistress and—and ah!—your equal.’

‘You have exactly, perfectly, put my ideal into words.’

‘Very well, then, to business. First of all, as there are a great many girls who answer to our description of brown hair and deep blue eyes, and as all descriptions are general, you shall choose for yourself. See!’

He waved his arm. Suddenly there descended upon a table at his elbow a little shower of photographs, cabinet size.

‘Good gracious!’ cried Raymond. ‘Where did these come from?’

‘I called them. Conjuring, that’s all. Now look through them and pick out the girl you want—if she is among them.’

There were at least a hundred—a great gallery of fair women. It was as if the hundred most beautiful women in the world had been ordered to send in their portraits. There they lay on the table, face upward, one above the other.

Raymond Ridge took them up and gazed upon them. His pale cheeks put on a touch of colour; his dull eyes glowed with a twilight glimmer; his lips parted. Love—the Love of the common herd—was hovering about him, and had brushed his cheek with one wing.

At last he threw down the rest and held out one. ‘Behold the girl of my dream!’ he cried. ‘Oh! if her mind were only equal to her form and face.’

‘You shall see.’

I have said that the place was a club smoking-room; the season was the month of June; the time was evening, about ten, when the room is often

empty ; nobody was there but themselves ; it was the last place in the world where one would expect such a thing. Yet Raymond Ridge suddenly found himself standing upon the sea shore ; the club had disappeared ; he was not looking upon a picture or a visionary thing of the imagination, or a scene at a theatre ; he was actually standing on the shingle. On his right the sea rolled up its waves and dragged the unresisting shingle backwards and forwards ; on his left there rose a high cliff, and in the cliff, a gap, or gate, and beyond the gap, farm buildings. The moon was full ; it was summer : the night was as clear and as bright as the day. Then he saw slowly coming through the gap, her hands thrown up behind her head, dressed in a kind of russet, bareheaded, the girl of the photograph, the girl described by Archie. He marked in a moment the splendour of her magnificent beauty : the splendour and pride of her youth ; the splendour of the promise in her eyes, and in her parted lips. She came down to the shore and stood where the waves just touched her feet. Then she lifted her voice—Oh ! ye Gods ! What a voice !—and sang. It was a German song, difficult except to the finest ear and the highest training. Yet how she sang it ! When she finished, he moved to speak to her. But he found himself back in the club—Archie Carew standing over him.

‘ Oh ! What does this mean ? ’ he cried, feeling dizzy.

‘ You look as if you had seen a vision, or had a dream. What is it, man ? We were talking of the Equal Woman—your own Equal. Such a woman as you have pictured is rare indeed. To find her we

must not look among the families who have been rich for generations. The culture of generations does not end in such a woman as you want. To find her we must go lower down—nearer the soil. I think I have heard of a girl who belongs to the yeoman class—her grandfathers have lived for ages on the same farm ; her father, however, was a sailor who gallantly went down with his ship after saving all his passengers. I should like you to know that girl. She has been educated by a lady. At present she lives in the country ; she sees no one ; she will, perhaps, marry a farmer—at best the curate. Her gifts and graces will be lost to the world. Yet I believe she has all the qualities—all that you desire. She has no money——’

A painful change passed over his companion’s face. In the last century they expressed it conventionally and prettily by saying that his jaw dropped.

‘No money ?’ he repeated.

‘Do you want money, then ? Why, you said nothing at all about money.’

‘No—no—but—but—you see—one’s own income may be enough for the simple wants of a man of taste : but—you understand—in fact, there must be money, unless one’s life is to be sordid with petty cares.’

‘The Perfect Love demands equality of income as well as of temperament. Well, of course it can be done, but there is this little difficulty. Consider. There is only so much money in the whole world, and whatever there is has its owners and its heirs. Even if you dig up a pot of rose nobles it belongs to the Lord of the Manor. Therefore, if this girl is to have money it can only be by somebody giving a fortune to her in place of his heirs. That might be an injustice.’

The Leader of the Future hesitated.

‘Why,’ he said, changing colour, ‘since one has nothing to do with it?’

‘You would not object, then, to the injustice. How much have you of your own?’

The young man blushed a really rosy colour; he looked for the moment almost healthy.

‘I—I—I think,’ he said, ‘that we need not go into that question exactly. One would be content, or otherwise it might seem like a low pecuniary transaction—let us have a round sum, without regard to myself—say—say—fifty thousand.’

‘It is a good deal. However——’ The Conjuror considered. A faint buzz of voices filled the room. A word or two here and there could be caught. ‘Only ten thousand—will live for forty years. A million—gone in the head—too late—property depreciated—farms unlet—eighty thousand—fifty-two thousand—given over—never married—only cousins.’

Archie held up his hand. ‘There is,’ he said, ‘a maiden lady, now stricken with a mortal disease. She has a property in the Funds amounting to about fifty-two thousand pounds. She will leave the whole to this girl of whom we are speaking. She has made up her mind; she sends for a lawyer; he has arrived. (By this conjuring of mine I can annihilate Time, lengthen it, or compress it as we please.) The lawyer takes her instructions. Listen.’ He held up his hollowed hand to his companion’s ear.

It was a woman’s voice, sweet and low, that spoke.

‘I am ill, and I am not likely to recover,’ she said. ‘I must make my will before I die. I have

neither brothers nor sisters ; my nearest relations are second cousins for whom I care nothing. I have resolved to leave the whole of my possessions to the daughter of my old friend——' (the listener did not catch the name). 'I loved him once, and I thought that he loved me. I know he did think of me ; but he was ordered to sea and he forgot me. I have educated his daughter, and I love her. For her father's sake I leave her all I have.'

'What does this mean?' asked Raymond, amazed.

Archie was lying back in his chair again, and made reply exactly as if nothing at all had happened.

'My dear fellow, you have described the woman whom you think your Equal—the only woman fit to be your mate. It would be a terrible thing for you to wander about for ever looking for her and not finding her. There is a girl, as I told you, who seems to me to have everything that you desire, including a large fortune. I hope some time or other to make you acquainted with her. Beautiful beyond your wildest dream—your Equal—look in the glass ; accomplished and clever—your Equal—think of all you know and can do ; the Equal Woman—your Equal, I repeat. Never, surely, did any young man of the Higher Criticism get such a chance. Go now. Qualify. Think of her gifts and graces, and of your own. If anything falls short of equality—but I need not tell you what to do. Qualify, young man. Qualify for the post of lover to such a Paragon and Phoenix.'

He laid his hands on Raymond's shoulders and pushed him gently, but firmly out of the room.

II

IN the morning Mr. Raymond Ridge awoke with a head full of miscellaneous emotions ; he might have been drinking too much, but that was not his weakness. He sprang out of bed, remembering suddenly the photograph, the vision, the voices, the fortune of fifty thousand pounds. He seized his coat, and searched in the pocket for the photograph. It was gone ! All he remembered of the face was that it was most lovely. The girl made for him—actually made for him—the Equal Woman, equal to himself—his own, his own ; and with a lovely fortune, fifty thousand !—at only $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., 1,750*l.* a year—a modest household might be kept up on 1,750*l.* a year. He sat down on the edge of his bed and enjoyed a quarter of an hour of most pleasing anticipation ; who would not pleasingly anticipate a lovely wife with a really big fortune ?

‘ Hang it ! ’ he cried, feeling beneath him the leaf of a crumpled rose. ‘ Why didn’t I say a hundred thousand while I was about it ? ’ Thus good fortune breeds greed, and greed begets discontent, and discontent is the mother of ingratitude.

Then he felt, not another crumpled rose, but a thorn ; a dozen spiky thorns sticking into him in the most cruel manner. For he remembered certain words. He was to go away and qualify. Qualify ! He of the Higher Criticism ! And yet, what could he do ? The man who had bestowed upon him this enormous and wonderful gift had the right to say anything. Qualify ? What did the man mean ?

While he was dressing he saw a letter lying on the table. It was in his sister’s handwriting, and he let

it lie. He was in no hurry : his sister was a person with whom his soul was not sympathetic ; besides, she reminded him of the days of small things when clubs and journals and the Higher Criticism were as yet unsuspected and beyond his youthful ambitions. He left the letter until he had taken the cup of tea which was the only thing provided at his lodging—and then he did not read it, but dropped it in his pocket. He spent the day in his usual manner : he wrote two or three paragraphs, full of cutting truths concerning men who had made some success in the world, and he finished an article on the Drama of the Period—showing that there is none—which he hoped to get into some magazine if he was lucky. In this he very finely trounced the Public for daring to like these favourites. Then he strolled in the Park, and would have been quite happy thinking of a day's work so satisfactory and so superior but for seeing one of these very favourites riding along the Row upon an undeniable animal. When—when would the affection of the Public enable him, too, to ride in the Row ? And all day long his mind kept returning to the Vision of the maiden by the sea and the Promise of that fifty thousand pounds. He went to his club—Archie was there, but he wouldn't look up—and sat down to read the evening paper. Then he remembered the letter in his pocket. He drew it out and opened it reluctantly—yet one has to read all the letters some time or other.

'Dear Sam,' it began—he swore a swear. '*She will do it,*' he murmured, '*though she knows I hate it*'—'I am very sorry to have bad news for you. Our second cousin, Angelica Merrydew, is

dead. She had been ill for some time but died suddenly at the end. I always thought that she would leave her money to us, as her nearest relations. She ought to have done so. It is a terrible thing to think of her soul going straight away, unannealed and unhanselled'—his sister had imperfect reminiscences of Scott—'after such an act of wickedness. She has left it all to a girl—no relation'—Raymond jumped—'whom, it seems, she has brought up. I always thought that she had an annuity of 200*l.* a year or so at the most. It now appears that she has been saving all her life and has left a fortune, actually, of over fifty thousand pounds ! I can never forgive myself for neglecting her. Oh ! what it would have been to us ? And Susan's husband says he can't go on much longer, and Ellen's boy is——' Raymond crumpled up the letter and read no more. His own second cousin—he had never seen her but she was sometimes mentioned in the family—just dead, and left an unknown girl all her money, fifty thousand pounds. Was it his girl ? Was it the Equal Woman ? Was that dowry given to her in order that it might come to him ? Why—it must be—it must be—and if so—why—so much the better. Had it been left to his own family to be divided among all he would have had 2,000*l.* at most for his own share, for there were other cousins. Whereas now, by this arrangement, he would have all—all—all—supposing this lucky heiress was the girl, his girl, his mistress—the Equal Woman. And she must be. He heaved a sigh. 'Better so,' he murmured with pious resignation, 'much better so.'

And then, oddly, he heard the voice of Archie,

though he was at the other end of the long room, close to his ear whispering, 'Much better so, Sam, isn't it?'

III

A TWELVEMONTH passed. The position of the Higher Critic was not materially improved. Two or three other young gentlemen had embarked in the same line, some prepared to go one higher still: now competition among Higher Critics is disgusting. Yet he was sustained by the Vision and the promise. That, namely, of the most beautiful damsel in the world, with 52,000%. Why, the dream of the superior young man is to marry money; always if he can he marries money, and generally he marries a girl a little older than himself. Then he can sit down, and give dinner-parties, and become an accepted Critic—a Judicial Critic; he can pronounce judgments all his life. The superior young man who is poor may pronounce as much as he pleases, but no one heeds him. Or, if they do, it is only to ask him what he has done that he should be acknowledged a Judge in Israel?

Exactly a twelvemonth to the day after the Vision of his Maiden and the moonlit beach he again met Archie Carew at the club. He was lying back in the same chair looking as if he had never moved from the spot.

'Oh!' he said, looking up lazily. 'I came to see you, Ridge. You remember that little talk we had about the Equal Woman? Of course you do, well—there is a girl staying with us now that perhaps you would like to meet—the girl I mentioned—unless, that is, you have already——'

‘No—no. I have not found her. I wait for her coming.’

‘Perhaps she has come. We shall see. To my mind she seems to possess all the qualities you wanted for your equal. That is, she is young, beautiful, accomplished, and possessed of a fairly good fortune.’

‘Oh! I see. It may be my ideal.’ This was interesting. ‘Have you told her anything about me?’

‘No. You will have to tell her yourself about yourself. Perhaps she wants the Equal Man. Then you will have to trot out the corresponding perfections. When she sees that you are really the Equal Man—— Well, dine with us to-morrow.’

‘With pleasure.’ But there was something in Archie’s eyes which troubled him—he knew not why.

‘At last,’ said his friend, ‘we shall see the union of the Equal Man and the Equal Woman. There will be a fine leaping of heart to heart; a fine beating of pulse responsive; a lovely darting of flame answering flame. By the way, you have taken steps to qualify? To-morrow, then, at eight.’

A dinner party of eighteen or twenty. Raymond arrived late, purposely, in order to be remarked. He stood in the door for a moment and swept his long hair from his pale and noble brow. Then he advanced. Yes, that tall and beautiful girl standing by his hostess must be the girl of his vision. He could not remember her face, but this must be the girl. In the vision she had on a frock of brown russet; now she was clothed in white samite—mystic,

wonderful. She turned her face. Heavens! the queenly head, the noble brow, the ample cheek, the dark blue—almost purple—eyes. She *was* the girl!

He was introduced to her. He learned that her name was Lilian Alington. He was directed to take her down to dinner. He walked in procession with her; he sat beside her; he felt bashful. For a time he was quite silent.

‘This,’ he began at last, ‘is a day to which I have long looked forward——’

‘Is it a day of importance?’

‘To me, of the greatest importance.’

‘Indeed?’ she asked, with no show of interest.

‘I seem to have seen you once before at the seaside.’

‘Possibly. I have lived by the sea.’

‘And naturally ever since I have longed for this opportunity. Miss Alington—may I ask?—have you been—ah!—prepared at all for this meeting?’

She turned her head and looked down upon him, coldly curious.

‘Prepared!’

‘Has our host told you what it means—the infinite possibilities of it?’

‘Really, Mr. Ridge, I do not in the least understand.’

‘I will explain another time. I was in hopes—but we can wait. Let us try, meantime, tentatively, to reveal our souls to each other.’

Lilian began to think this young man must be more than a little cracked.

‘That terrible, awful Academy!’ he always began

with painting, and then went on to fiction and the drama. 'Have you ventured yet within its walls? Have you tried to look at the blurred canvases that they call pictures? Yet they have—they really have—their uses. Whenever—which is seldom—I feel any touch of hope or optimism, I hurry to the Academy. That cures me.'

'I have been several times to the Royal Academy.' The girl spoke clearly and decidedly. 'I have not yet seen half the pictures. There are many very fine paintings there, many full of imagination; many of the finest drawing; many rich in colours; many with the truest sense of nature. There has certainly never been any time when English art stood on a higher level than now.'

He was so astonished that he dropped his *pince-nez* into the soup. He was quite silent for the space of five minutes.

'When you do me the honour of listening to me,' he said, recovering a little after he had wiped his glasses, 'I shall be able to prove to you that the Art of Painting exists no longer in this country.'

'Will you? But I should refuse to listen to any one who proposed such an absurdity. No one who understands the merest elements of the Art could possibly think so. Can you paint, or draw? Have you attended any school of Art? Do you know the powers and limitations of colour?'

'It is not necessary for a critic of my school to be also a painter.'

'On the contrary. Without a knowledge of the technique, no one can possibly be a critic. We will not speak any more, if you please, about Art.'

Her colour had risen slightly. She spoke with such firmness that the young man quailed.

He tried her again on the subject of the drama; the absolutely contemptible condition of which is, with his school, a mere axiom.

‘I cannot for a moment accept that assumption of yours,’ she said. ‘The drama of the day has some very good points. People want to be amused, first of all, and there are some very amusing pieces now on the stage. They like a good story, and there are some excellent stories for them to see and hear. Have you ever written a play?’

‘N—no. Not yet. I may have ambitions.’

‘Then you must speak humbly. A young man cannot be a critic of the drama at all unless he has the practical knowledge gained by experience and attempt. When you are older and have proved that you possess something of the critical faculty—which is rarer than the creative, I believe—you may perhaps be allowed to speak. Meantime, you talk very confidently of decay. Is there any modern French or English play at all that you consider to be a good play? I think I have seen and read a good many plays, and I daresay that I should know any that you would like to discuss.’

He made no answer. But he now felt horribly uncomfortable. Where was the deference he expected? Where the recognition of his genius?

‘Is Fiction, too, in decay?’ she asked.

‘Fiction?’ he almost screamed. ‘No man—no man who respects himself would read a modern English novel.’

She laughed. ‘I thought there was only one

standard of Art,' she said, 'but I now perceive there may be more than one—that is, that some minds may imagine another standard. I respect myself very much, Mr. Ridge; so do certain people, my friends; we think we are a cultivated folk; and I assure you that there are many living novelists, English and American, whom we continue to read with the greatest delight. Now, from the standard which I have been taught, English fiction is in a very good condition indeed.'

'Oh! The three-volume love story!'

'Love, Mr. Ridge,' said this maiden, without the least blush, 'is the most important thing in the whole life of man or woman. Love will always be the main theme of poet, of novelist, and of dramatist. But if you do not like to read about love there are plenty of stories nowadays without any. Pray have you ever written a novel?'

'For my novel,' he replied grandly, 'there would be no Public.'

'But really, if that is so, you can have none of the qualities of a novelist. The Public taste is, I am informed, very catholic; it likes everything that is good, though its opinion as to what makes goodness varies. Some part of the Public likes fried fish, and another part this *côtelette à la Soubise*. But you really must not speak of the decay of Fiction until you have some knowledge, if not mastery, of the Art.'

Again he fell back. For the moment he was crushed. He said no more during the rest of the dinner, and the girl turned her shoulder and talked with the man on the other side—a big good-looking

Philistine beast, who laughed and told stories that made the girl laugh. Good heavens! He knew the man's face. He was actually that terrible person, a popular novelist; young too, one of the wretched, miserable, degraded crew who are now dragging the noble art of Fiction in the mud. And she was talking and laughing with him!

In the evening he tried again. The girl sang a song, a lovely song; her splendid voice rang clear and loud; she sang it with so much feeling that when she finished the people caught their breath. Then he advanced boldly. 'Thank you,' he said, murmurous. 'That song appeals to the Inner Soul. It reveals the Inexpressible. I was afraid you might be going to sing Schubert.'

'That is Schubert,' she replied coldly.

The popular novelist stood by and heard it with a twinkling eye.

He retreated, feeling very weak. He got no more chance that evening. The girl was surrounded; she sang again; he stayed in a corner; perhaps she would miss him; he should see her eyes wandering about the room in search of him. In his blind conceit he could not imagine it possible that he had made no impression at all upon her. The boldness, the singularity, the originality of his views must have impressed her, even though, for the moment, she was unable to rise quite to his level. He came away, however, with a sense of disappointment, almost of doubt. The first interview had not been successful.

He called a day or two afterwards; he talked his best; Lilian heard him politely; then she bowled him

over. She quoted sayings of great masters; she convicted him of ignorance; he retired with discomfiture. What did it mean? Was he premature? Should he give her more time?

He had many opportunities. He met her in a picture gallery alone; in Kensington Gardens alone; he saw her several times alone; he had every possible chance. Yet always he retired with the feeling of discomfiture. And the opportunity seemed never to arrive when he could tell her all, and claim her, absolutely claim her, as his own. Once he met Archie at the club.

‘Aha!’ he cried, ‘pulse answers pulse. The Equal Man and the Equal Woman. Lucky dog!’

One night, however, he saw a thing that forced upon him the necessity of immediate action. It was at a dance. He went there in order to meet her. For himself he could not dance. She could, however. She danced without sitting down. Yes, once she sat down, and Raymond saw her, in a conservatory, with a man—no other than the wretched impostor of a popular novelist already mentioned. Love was in his eyes and in his attitude as he bent over her and whispered. A cold chill crept down Raymond’s back. He was not prepared for the appearance of another man.

Next day he called in the morning. He was pale and solemn—the time was come—he was about to claim his bride.

‘You wish to see me alone, Mr. Ridge?’ asked Lilian. She had a fine colour, and her eyes were brighter than usual. She understood very well that a decisive moment was coming. This little man, who

talked a jargon, and was always meeting her in unexpected places, was going to speak.

‘I have come,’ he said, ‘to ask if I may venture for an explanation. Have you treated me as I had a right to expect?’

‘You—had—a—right—a right to expect?’ asked Lilian. ‘Pray, what is the meaning of this?’

‘I mean,’ he replied coldly, yet with anxiety, ‘that when a girl has been made for a man, cut out for him, provided with accomplishments for him, enriched for him, made the Ideal woman—the Equal Woman—for him, he has a right to expect consideration. You have scoffed and mocked at me. I have laid bare my soul for you, and you laugh at it——’

‘Oh! The man is mad! Made for you? What do you mean? I never heard of you till three or four weeks ago. Is it my fault that you dangle about talking nonsense inexpressible?’

‘You were made for me. You were—oh!’ he screamed—never was stranger wooing—‘you have actually got my money—my money—my cousin’s money—that should have been mine. I claim you. Your beauty, your genius, your voice, your fortune are all—all—of my devising, and inventing and choosing. You had nothing till I made it and gave it to you. I claim it all. Give it back to me—or give me—yourself.’ For once he rose to the occasion. He spoke in earnest; he was real.

Lilian rang the bell violently, facing him as one faces a madman.

‘Archie’—it was Archie himself who opened the door—‘here is a madman. He wants to claim me,

he says—to claim my voice—my everything. He follows me about; he meets me everywhere. He says I was made for him. Will you send him away?’

‘What is the meaning of this?’ asked Archie coldly, looking down upon the distracted critic.

‘I claim her,’ cried Raymond, maddened. ‘I claim her. Nobody knows better than you by what right. She is mine. I invented her.’

‘Oh,’ said Lilian, looking down upon him with pity, ‘he is quite mad. I thought all along that he was mad, on account of his foolish talk. Be gentle with him, Archie. I do not think we need be afraid of him.’

‘You know—you—’ Raymond cried again. ‘You gave her everything—for me—my own money—for me.’ He choked, he gasped, he beat the air with his hands.’

‘Calm yourself,’ said Archie. ‘You are thinking, I believe, of a certain conversation we had a year ago. I then described a woman—a very grand and noble woman—whom you had the audacity to call your Equal: the Equal Woman, you said. I warned you on the spot to qualify on the chance of meeting that woman. You have been thinking about her until your head has got a little turned. Well, that woman I described—you have met her—she is here—but you have not qualified. My friend, such a woman is far, far, very far above you. She is absolutely unattainable for you.’

Raymond groaned, and wrung his hands. Literally, he wrung his hands. One would have thought the gesture gone out. But no; in moments of great emotion it lingers still.

‘I will show you,’ Archie went on, ‘if you please, the woman who is your Equal. She is not beautiful, nor are you; she is not clever, nor are you; she is full of jargon——’

Raymond shrieked and fled.

In the first week of August there was a wedding which attracted many people. It was that of Mr. Henry Fielding, novelist, young and popular, to Lilian, daughter of the late Roger Alington, Captain of the Orient ss. ‘Dædalus.’

THE SHRINKING SHOE

I

‘Oh you poor dear!’ said the two Elder Sisters in duet, ‘you’ve got to stay at home while we go to the ball. Good night, then. We *are* so sorry for you! We did hope that you were going too!’

‘Good night, Elder Sisters,’ said the youngest, with a tear just showing in either eye, but not rolling down her cheek. ‘Go and be happy. If you *should* see the Prince you may tell him that I am waiting for the Fairy and the Pumpkin and the Mice.’

The Elder Sisters fastened the last button—the sixth, was it? or the tenth perhaps—took one last critical, and reassuring, look at the glass, and departed.

When the door shut the Youngest Sister sat down by the fire; and one, two, three tears rolled down her cheeks.

Mind you, she had very good cause to cry. Many girls cry for much less. She was seventeen: she had understood that she would come out at this visit to London. Coming out, to this country girl, meant just this one dance and nothing more. But no—her sisters were invited and she was not. She was left alone in the house. And she sat down by the fire and allowed herself to be filled with gloom and sadness,

and with such thoughts as, in certain antiquated histories, used to be called rebellious. In short, she was in a very bad temper indeed. Never before had she been in such a bad temper. As a general rule she was sweet-tempered as the day is long. But—which is a terrible thing to remember—there are always the possibilities of bad temper in every one: even in Katharine—Katie—Kitty, who generally looked as if she could never, never, never show by any outward sign that she was vexed, or cross, or put out, or rebellious. And now, alas! she was in a bad temper. No hope, no sunshine, no future prospects; her life was blasted—her young spring life. Disaster irretrievable had fallen upon her. She could not go to the ball. What made things worse was, that the more angry she grew the louder she heard the dance music, though the band was distant more than a mile. Quite plainly she heard the musicians. They were playing a valse which she knew—a delicious, delirious, dreamy, swinging valse. She saw her sisters among a crowd of the most lovely girls in the world, whirling in the cadence that she loved upon a floor as smooth as ice, with cavaliers gallant and gay. The room was filled with maidens beautifully dressed, like her sisters, and with young men come to meet and greet them on their way. Oh, happy young men! Oh, happy girls! Katie had been brought up with such simplicity that she envied no other girl, whether for her riches or for her dresses; and was always ready to acknowledge the loveliness and the sweetness and the grace of any number of girls—even of her own age. As regards her own sex, indeed, this child of seventeen had but one fault; she considered twenty as already a serious

age, and wondered how anybody could possibly laugh after five-and-twenty. And, as many, or most, girls believe, she thought that beauty was entirely a matter of dress ; and that, except on state occasions, no one should think of beauty—*i.e.*, of fine dress.

She sat there for half an hour. She began to think that it would be best to go to bed and sleep off her chagrin, when a Rat-tat-tat at the door roused her. Who was that? Could it—could it—could it be the Fairy with the Pumpkin and the Mice?

‘My dear Katie’—it was not the Fairy, but it was the Godmother—‘how sorry I am! Quick—lay out the things, Ladbroke.’ Ladbroke was a maid, and she bore a parcel. ‘It’s not my fault. The stupid people only brought the things just now. It was my little surprise, dear. We will dress her here, Ladbroke. I was going to bring the things in good time, to surprise you at the last moment. Never mind: you will only be a little late. I hope and trust the things will fit. I got one of your frocks, and Ladbroke here can, if necessary— — There, Katie! What do you think of that for your first ball dress?’

Katie was so astonished that she could say nothing, not even to thank her godmother. Her heart beat and her hands trembled; the maid dressed her and did her hair; her godmother gave her a necklace of pearls and a little bunch of flowers: she put on the most charming pair of white satin shoes: she found in the parcel a pair of white gloves with ever so many buttons, and a white fan with painted flowers. When she looked at the glass she could not understand it at all; for she was transformed. But never was any girl dressed so quickly.

‘Oh!’ she cried. ‘You *are* a Fairy. And you’ve got a Pumpkin as well?’

‘The Pumpkin is at the door with the Mice. Come, dear. I shall be proud of my *débutante*.’

The odd thing was that all the times she was dressing, and all the time she sat in the carriage, Katie heard that valse tune ringing in her ears, and when they entered the ball-room that very same identical valse was being played, and the smooth floor was covered with dancers, gallant young men and lovely maidens—all as she had seen and heard in her vision. Oh! there is something in the world more than coincidence. There must be; else, why did Katie . . .

‘Oh, my dear,’ said the Elder Sisters, stopping in their dance, ‘you have come at last! We knew you were coming, but we couldn’t tell. Shall we tell the Prince you are here?’

Then a young gentleman was presented to her. But Katie was too nervous to look up when he bowed and begged. After a little, Katie found that his step went very well with hers. She was then able to consider things a little. Her first partner in her first ball was quite a young man—she had not caught his name, Mr. Geoffrey something—a handsome young man, she thought, but rather shy. He began to talk about the usual things.

‘I live in the country,’ she said, to explain her ignorance. ‘And this is my first ball. So, you see, I do not know any people or anything.’

He danced with her again: she was a wonderfully light dancer; she was strangely graceful; he found her, also, sweet to look at; she had soft eyes and a curiously soft voice, which was as if all the sympathy

in all the world had been collected together and deposited in that little brain. He had the good fortune to take her in to supper ; and, being a young man at that time singularly open to the charms of maidens, he lavished upon her all the attentions possible. Presently he was so far subdued by her winning manner that he committed the foolishness of Samson with his charmer. He told his secret. Just because she showed a little interest in him, and regarded him with eyes of wonder, he told her the great secret of his life—his ambition, the dream of his youth, his purpose. Next morning he felt he had been a fool. The girl would tell other girls, and they would all laugh together. He felt hot and ashamed for a moment. Then he thought of her eyes, and how they lightened when he whispered ; and of her voice, and how it sank when she murmured sympathy and hope and faith. No—with such a girl his secret was safe.

So it was. But for her, if you think of it, was promotion indeed ! For a girl who a few days before had been at school, under rules and laws, hardly daring to speak—certainly not daring to have an opinion of her own—now receiving deferential homage from a young man at least four years her senior, and actually being entrusted with his secret ambitions ! More ; there were other young men waiting about, asking for a dance ; all treating her as if—well, modern manners do not treat young ladies with the old reverential courtesy—as if she were a person of considerable importance. But she liked the first young man the best. He had such an honest face, this young man. It was a charming supper, and,

with her charming companion, Katie talked quite freely and at her ease. How nice to begin with a partner with whom one could be quite at one's ease ! But everything at this ball was delightful.

After the young man had told his secret, blushing profoundly, Katie told hers—how she had as nearly as possible missed her first ball ; and how her sisters had gone without her and left her in the cinders, crying.

‘ Fairy Godmother turned up at the last moment, and when I was dressed and we went out,’ she laughed merrily, ‘ we found the Pumpkin and the Mice turned into a lovely carriage and pair.’

‘ It is a new version of the old story,’ said the young man.

‘ Yes,’ she replied thoughtfully, ‘ and now all I want is to find the Prince.’

The young man raised his eyes quickly. They said, with great humility, ‘ If I could only be the Prince !’ She read those words, and she blushed and became confused, and they talked no more that night.

‘ It was all lovely,’ she said in the carriage going home. ‘ All but one thing—one thing that I said—oh, such a stupid thing !’

‘ What was it you said, Katie ?’

‘ No : I could never tell anybody. It was *too* stupid. Oh ! To think of it makes me turn red. It almost spoiled the evening. And he saw it too.’

‘ What was it, Katie ?’

But she would not tell the Elder Sisters.

‘ Who was it,’ asked one of them, ‘ that took Katie in to supper ?’

‘ A young man named Armiger, I believe. Horace

told me,' said the other Elder. Horace was a cousin. 'Horace says he is a cousin of a Sir Roland Armiger, about whom I know nothing. Horace says he is a good fellow—very young yet—an undergraduate somewhere. He is a nice-looking boy.'

Then the Elder Sisters began to talk about matters really serious—namely, themselves and their own engagements—and Katie was forgotten.

Two days after the ball there arrived a parcel addressed to the three sisters collectively—'The Misses De Lisle.' The three sisters opened it together, with Evelike curiosity.

It contained a white satin shoe; a silver buckle set with pearls adorned it, and a row of pearls ran round the open part. A most dainty shoe; a most attractive shoe; a most bewildering shoe.

'This,' said the Elder Sisters, solemnly, 'must be tried on by all of us in succession.'

The Elder Sisters began: it was too small for either, though they squeezed and made faces and an effort and a fuss, and everything that could be made except making the foot go into the shoe. Then Katie tried it on. Wonderful to relate, the foot slipped in quite easily. Yet they say that there is nothing but coincidence in the world.

Katie blushed and laughed and blushed again. Then she folded up the shoe in its silver paper and carried it away; and nobody ever heard her mention that shoe again. But everybody knew that she kept it, and the Elder Sisters marvelled because the young prince did not come to see that shoe tried on. He did not appear. Why not? Well—because he was too shy to call.

There are six thousand five hundred and sixty-three variants of this story, as has been discovered through the invaluable researches of the Folk-Lore Society, and it would be strange if they all ended in the same way.

II

THE young man told his secret; he revealed what he had never before whispered to any living person; he told his ambition—the most sacred thing that a young man possesses or can reveal.

There are many kinds of ambition; many of them are laudable; we are mostly ambitious of those things which seem to the lowest imagination to be within our reach—such, for instance, as the saving of money. Those who aspire to things which seem out of reach suffer the pain and the penalty of the common snub. This young man aspired to things which seemed to other people quite beyond his reach; for he had no money, and his otherwise highly respectable family had no political influence, and such a thing had never before been heard of among his people that one of themselves should aspire to greater greatness than the succession to the family title with the family property. As a part of the new Revolution, which is already upon us, there will be few things indeed which an ambitious young man will consider beyond his reach. At the present moment, if I were to declare my ambition to become, when I grow up, Her Britannic Majesty's Ambassador at Paris, the thing would be actually received with derision. My young life would be blasted with contempt. Wait, however, for fifty years: you shall then

see to what heights I will reach out my climbing hands.

Geoffrey Armiger would have soared. He saw before him the cases of Canning, of Burke, of Disraeli, of Robert Lowe, and of many others who started without any political influence and with no money, and he said to himself, 'I, too, will become a Statesman.'

That was the secret which he confided into Katie's ear; it was in answer to a question of hers, put quite as he could have wished, as to his future career. 'I have told no one,' he replied in a low voice, and with conscious flush. 'I have never ventured to tell any one, because my people would not understand; they are not easily moved out of the ordinary groove. There is a family living, and I am to have it: that is the fate to which I am condemned. But——' his lips snapped; resolution flamed in his eyes.

'Oh!' cried Katie. 'It is splendid! You must succeed. Oh! To be a great Statesman. Oh! There is only one thing better—to be a great Poet. You might be both.'

Geoffrey replied modestly that, although he had written verse, he hardly expected to accomplish both greatness in poetry and greatness as a legislator. The latter, he declared, would be good enough for him.

That was the secret which this young man confided to the girl. You must own that, for such a young man to reveal such a secret to this girl, on the very first evening that he met her, argues for the maiden the possession of sympathetic qualities quite above the common.

III

FIVE years change a boy of twenty into a mature man of twenty-five, and a *débutante* of seventeen into an old woman of twenty-two. The acknowledgment of such a fact may save the historian a vast quantity of trouble.

It was five years after the great event of the ball. The family cousin, Horace, of whom mention has been already made, was sitting in his chambers at ten or eleven in the evening. With him sat his friend Sir Geoffrey Armiger, a young man whom you have already met. The death of his cousin had transformed him from a penniless youth into a baronet with a great estate (which might have been in Spain or Ireland for all the good it was), and with a great fortune in stocks. There was now no occasion for him to take the family living: that had gone to a deserving stranger; a clear field lay open for his wildest ambitions. This bad fortune to the cousin, who was still quite young, happened the year after the ball. Of course, therefore, the young man of vast ambition had already both feet on the ladder? You shall see.

‘What are you going to do all the summer?’ asked the family cousin, Horace.

‘I don’t know,’ Geoffrey replied languidly. ‘Take the yacht somewhere, I suppose. Into the Baltic, perhaps. Will you come too?’

‘Can’t. I’ve got work to do. I shall run over to Switzerland for three weeks perhaps. Better come with me and do some climbing.’

Geoffrey shook his head.

‘Man!’ cried the other impatiently, ‘you want

something to do. Doesn't it bore you—just going on day after day, day after day, with nothing to think of but your own amusement?'

Geoffrey yawned. 'The Profession of Amusement,' he said, 'is, in fact, deadly dull.'

'Then why follow it?'

'Because I am so rich. You fellows who've got nothing *must* work. When a man is not obliged to work, there are a thousand excuses. I don't believe that I *could* work now if I wanted to. Yet I used to have ambitions.'

You did. When it was difficult to find a way to live while you worked, you had enormous ambitions. "If only I was not obliged to provide for the daily bread;" that was what you used to say. Well, now the daily bread is provided, what excuse have you?'

'I tell you a thousand excuses present themselves the moment I think of doing any work. Besides, the ambitions are dead!'

'Dead! And at five-and-twenty! They can't be dead.'

'They are. Dead and buried. Killed by five years' racket. Profession of Pleasure—Pleasure, I believe they call it. No man can follow more than one profession.'

'Well, old man, if the world's pleasures are already rather dry in the mouth, what will they be when you've been running after them for fifty years?'

'There are cards, I believe. Cards are always left. No,'—he got up and leaned over the mantelshelf,— 'I can't say that the fortune has brought much happiness with it. That's the worst of being rich. You see very well that you are not half so happy as the

fellows who are making their own way, and yet you can't give up your money and start fair with the rest. I always think of that story of the young man who was told to give up all he had to the poor. He couldn't, you see. He saw very clearly that it would be best for him; but he couldn't. I am that young man. If I was like you, with all the world to conquer, I should be ten times as strong and a hundred times as clever. I know it—yet I cannot give up the money.'

'Nobody wants you to give it up. But surely you could go on like other fellows—as if you hadn't got it, I mean.'

'No—you don't understand. It's like a millstone tied round your neck. It drags you down and keeps you down.'

'Why don't you marry?'

'Why don't I? Well, when I meet the girl I fancy I will marry if she will have me. I suppose I'm constitutionally cold, because as yet—— Who is this girl?' He took up a cabinet photograph which stood on the mantelshelf. 'I seem to know the face. It's a winning kind of face—what they call a beseeching face. Where have I seen it?'

'That? It is the portrait of a cousin of mine. I don't think you can have met her anywhere, because she lives entirely in the country.'

'I have certainly seen her somewhere. Perhaps in a picture. Beatrice, perhaps. It is the face of an angel. Faces sometimes deceive, though: I know a girl in quite the smartest set who can assume the most saintly face when she pleases. She puts it on when she converses with the curate; when she goes to church she becomes simply angelic. At other

times—— Your cousin does not, however, I should say, follow the Profession of Amusement.'

'Not exactly. She lives in a quiet little seaside place where they've got a convalescent home, and she slaves for the patients.'

'It is a beautiful face,' Geoffrey repeated. 'But I seem to know it.' He looked at the back of the photograph. 'What are these lines written at the back?'

'They are some nonsense rhymes written by herself. There is a little family tradition that Katie is waiting for her Prince—she says so herself—she has refused a good many men. I think she will never marry, because she certainly will not find the man she dreams of.'

'May I read the lines?' He read them aloud:—

'Oh! tell me, Willow-wren and White-throat, beating
The sluggish breeze with eager homeward wing,
Bear you no message for me—not a greeting
From him you left behind—my Prince and King?

'You come from far—from south and east and west;
Somewhere you left him, daring some great thing,
I know not what, save that it is the best:
Somewhere you saw him—saw my Prince and King.

'You cannot choose but know him: by the crown
They place upon his head—the crown and ring;
And by the loud and many-voiced renown
After the footsteps of my Prince and King.

'He speaks, and lo! the listening world obeys;
He leads, and all men follow; and they cling,
And hang around the words and works and ways,
As of a Prophet—of my Prince and King.

'What matter if he comes not, though I wait?
Bear you no greeting for me, birds of spring?
Again—what matter, since his work is great,
And greater grows his name—my Prince and King.'

‘You see,’ said the cousin, ‘she has set up an ideal man.’

‘Yes. Why does she call him her Prince?’

The cousin laughed. ‘There is a story about a ball—her first ball—her last too, poor child, because—well, there were losses, you know. Like the landlady, Katie has known better days; and friends died, and so she lives by herself in this little village, and looks after her patient convalescents.’

‘What about her first ball?’

‘Well, she nearly missed it, because her godmother, who meant to give her a surprise, lost a train or got late somehow. So her Elder Sisters went without her, and she arrived late; and they said that, to complete the story, nothing was wanted but the Prince.’

Geoffrey started and changed colour.

‘That’s all. She imagined a Prince, and goes on with her dream. She enacts a novel which never comes to an end, and has no situations, and has an invisible hero.’

Geoffrey laid down the photograph. He now remembered everything, including the sending of the slipper. But the cousin had quite forgotten his own part in the story.

‘I must go,’ he said. ‘I think I shall take the yacht somewhere round the coast. You say your cousin lives at——’

‘Oh! Yes, she lives at Shellacomb Bay, near Torquay. Sit down again.’

‘No. Dull place, Shellacomb Bay: I’ve been there, I think.’ He was rather irresolute, but that was his way. ‘I must go. I rather think there are some men coming into my place about this time.’

There will be nap. All professionals, you know—Professors of Amusement. It's dull work. I say, if your cousin found her Prince, what an awful, awful disappointment it would be !'

IV

At five in the morning Geoffrey was left alone. The night's play was over. He turned back the curtains and opened the windows, letting in the fresh morning air of April. He leaned out and took a deep breath. Then he returned to the room. The table was littered with packs of cards. There was a smell of a thousand cigarettes. It is an acrid smell, not like the honest downright smell of pipes and cigars ; the board was covered with empty soda-water and champagne bottles.

'The Professional Pursuer of Pleasure,' he murmured. 'It's a learned profession, I suppose. Quite a close profession. Very costly to get into, and beastly stupid and dull when you are in it. A learned profession, certainly.'

He sat down, and his thoughts returned to the girl who had made for herself a Prince. 'Her Prince !' he said bitterly. And then the words came back to him—

'Daring some great thing,
I know not what, save that it is the best :
Somewhere you saw him—saw my Prince and King.'

'For one short night I was her Prince and King,' he murmured. 'And I sent her the slipper—was stone-broke a whole term after through buying that slipper. And after all I was afraid to call at the house. Her Prince and King. I wonder——' He

looked about him again—looked at the empty bottles. ‘*What a Prince and King!*’ he laughed bitterly.

Then he sprang to his feet; he opened a drawer and took from it a bundle of letters, photographs, cards of invitation which were lying there piled up in confusion. He threw these on the fire in a heap; he opened another drawer and pulled out another bundle of notes and papers. These also he threw on the fire. ‘*There!*’ he said resolutely. What he meant I know not, for he did not wait to see them burned, but went into his bedroom and so to bed.

V

GEOFFREY spoke no more than the simple truth when he said that Katie De Lisle had a saintly face—the face of an angel. It was a lovely face when he first saw it—the face of a girl passing into womanhood. Five years of tranquil life, undisturbed by strong emotions, devoted to unselfish labours and to meditation, had now made that face saintly indeed. It was true that she had created for herself a Prince, one who was at once a Galahad of romance and a leader of the present day, chivalrous knight and Paladin of Parliament. What she did with her Prince I do not know. Whether she thought of him continually or only seldom, whether she believed in him or only hoped for him, no one can tell. When a man proposed to her—which happened whenever a man was presented to her—she refused him graciously, and told her sisters, who were now matrons, that another person had come representing himself to be the Prince, but that she had detected an impostor, for he was not the Prince.

And it really seemed as if she never would find this impossible Prince, which was a great pity, if only because she had a very little income, and the Elder Sisters, who lived in great houses, desired her also to have a great house. Of course, every Prince who regards his own dignity must have a big house of his own.

Now, one afternoon in April, when the sun sets about a quarter-past seven and it is light until eight, Katie was sitting on one of the benches placed on the shore for the convenience of the convalescents, two or three of whom were strolling along the shore. The sun was getting low; a warmth and glow lay upon the bay like an illuminated mist. Katie had a book in her hand, but she let it drop into her lap, and sat watching the beauty and the splendour and the colour of the scene before her. Then there came, rounding the southern headland, a steam yacht, which slowly crept into the bay, and dropped anchor and let off steam: a graceful little craft, with her slender spars and her dainty curves. The girl watched with a little interest. Not often did craft of any kind put into that bay. There were bays to the east and bays to the west, where ships, boats, fishing smacks, and all kind of craft put in; but not in that bay, where there was no quay, or port, or anything but the convalescents, and Katie the volunteer nurse. So she watched, sitting on the bench, with the western sun falling upon her face.

After a little a boat was lowered, and a man and a boy got into it. The boy took the sculls and rowed the man ashore. The man jumped out, stood irresolutely looking about him, observed Katie on the bench,

looked at her rather rudely it seemed, and walked quickly towards her. What made her face turn pale? What made her cheek turn red and pale? Nothing less than the appearance of her Prince—her Prince. She knew him at once. Her Prince! It was her Prince come to her at last.

But the Prince did not hold out both hands and cry, 'I have come.' Not at all. He gravely and politely took off his hat. 'Miss De Lisle,' he said. 'I cannot hope that you remember me. I only met you once. But I—I heard that you were here, and I remembered your face at once.'

'I seldom forget people,' she replied, rising and giving him her hand. 'You are Mr. Geoffrey Armiger. We danced together one night. I remember it especially, because it was my first ball.'

'Which you nearly missed, and were left at home like Cinderella, till the fairy godmother came. I—I am cruising about here. I learned that you were living here from your cousin in the Temple, and—and I thought that, if we put in here, I might, perhaps, venture to call.'

'Certainly. I shall be very glad to see you, Mr. Armiger. It is seven o'clock now. Will you come to tea to-morrow afternoon?'

'With the greatest pleasure. May I walk with you—in your direction?'

The situation was delicate. What Geoffrey wanted to convey was this: 'You once received the confidences of a young man who hoped to do great things in the world. You have gone on believing that he would do great things. You have built up an ideal man, before whom all other men are small creatures. Well, that

ideal must be totally disconnected with the young fellow who started it, because he has gone to the bad. He is only a Professor of Amusement, an idle killer of time, a man who wastes all his gifts and powers.' A difficult thing to say, because it involved charging the girl with, or telling her he knew that she had been, actually thinking of him for five years.

That evening he got very little way. He reminded her again of the ball. He said that she had altered very little, which was true; for at twenty-two Katie preserved much the same ethereal beauty that she had at seventeen. That done, his jaws stuck, to use a classical phrase. He could say no more. He left her at the door of her cottage,—she lived in a cottage in the midst of tree fuchsias and covered with roses,—and went back to his yacht, where he had a solitary dinner and passed a morose evening.

At five o'clock in the afternoon next day he called again. Miss De Lisle was at the Home, but would come back immediately. The books on the girl's table betrayed the character of her mind. Katie's books showed the level of her thoughts and the standard of her ideals. They were the books of a girl who meditates. There are such people, even in this busy and noisy age. Geoffrey took them up with a sinking heart. Professors of Amusement never read such books.

Then she came in, quiet, serene; and they sat down, and the tea was brought in.

'Now, tell me,' she said abruptly. 'I see by your card that you have a title. What did you do to get it?'

'Nothing. I succeeded.'

‘Oh!’ Her face fell a little. ‘When I saw you—the only time that I saw you—I remember that you had great ambitions. What have you done?’

‘Nothing. Nothing at all. I have wasted my time. I have lived a life of what they call pleasure. I don’t know that I ought to have called upon you at all.’

‘Is it possible? Oh! Can it be possible? Only a life of pleasure? And you—you with your noble dreams? Oh! Is it possible?’

‘It is possible. It is quite true. I am the prodigal son, who has so much money that he cannot get through it. But do you remember the silly things I said? Why, you see, what happened was, that when the temptation came all the noble dream vanished.’

‘Is it possible?’ she repeated. ‘Oh! I am so very, very sorry!’—in fact, the tears came into her eyes. ‘You have destroyed the one illusion that I nourished.’ Every one thinks that he has only one illusion and a clear eye for everything else. That is the Great, the Merciful, Illusion. ‘I thought that there was one true man at least in the world, fighting for the right. I had been honoured as a girl with the noble ambitions of that man when he was quite young. I thought I should hear of him from time to time winning recognition, power, and authority. It was a beautiful dream. It made me feel almost as if I were myself taking part in that great career, even from this obscure corner in the country. No one knows the pleasure that a woman has in watching the career of a brave and wise man. And now it is gone. I am sorry you called,’—her voice became stony

and her eyes hard : even an angel or a saint has moments of righteous indignation,—‘ I am very sorry, Sir Geoffrey Armiger, that you took the trouble to call.’

Her visitor rose. ‘ I am also very sorry,’ he said, ‘ that I have said or done anything to pain you. Forgive me : I will go.’

But he lingered. He took up a paper-knife, and considered it as if it were something rare and curious. He laid it down. Then he laughed a little short laugh, and turned to Katie with smiling lips and solemn eyes.

‘ Did that slipper fit ? ’ he asked, abruptly.

She blushed. But she answered him.

‘ It was too small for my Elder Sisters, but it fitted me.’

‘ Will you try it on again ? ’

She went out of the room and presently returned with the pretty, jewelled, little slipper. She took off her shoe, sat down, and tried it on.

‘ You see,’ she said, ‘ it is now too small for my foot. Oh ! my foot has not changed in the least. It has grown too small.’

‘ Try again.’ The Prince looked on anxiously. ‘ Perhaps, with a little effort, a little goodwill——’

‘ No ; it is quite hopeless. The slipper has shrunk ; you can see for yourself, if you remember what it was like when you bought it. See, it is ever so much smaller than it was, Sir Geoffrey.’ She looked up, gravely. ‘ See for yourself. And the silver buckle is black, and even the pearls are tarnished. See ! ’ There was a world of meaning in her words. ‘ Think what it was five years ago.’

He took it from her hand and turned it round and round disconsolately.

‘You remember it—five years ago—when it was new?’ the girl asked again.

‘I remember. Oh! yes, I remember. A pretty thing it was then, wasn’t it? A world of promise in it, I remember. Hope, and courage, and—and all kinds of possibilities. Pity—silver gone black, pearls tarnished, colour faded, the thing itself shrunken. Yes.’ He gave it back to her. ‘I’m glad you’ve kept it.’

‘Of course I kept it.’

‘Yes, of course. Will you go on keeping it?’

‘I think so. One likes to remember a time of promise, and of hope, and courage, and, as you say, all kinds of possibilities.’

He sighed.

‘Slippers are so. There are untold sympathies in slippers. I call this the Oracle of the slipper. Not that I am in the least surprised. I came here, in fact, on purpose to ascertain, if I could, the amount of shrinkage. It would be interesting to return every five years or so, just to see how much it shrinks every year. Next time it would be a doll’s shoe, for instance. Well, now’—again he fell back upon the paper-knife—‘there was something else I had to say; something else——’ He dropped his eyes and examined the paper-knife closely. ‘The other day in your cousin’s rooms I saw your photograph; and I remembered the kind of young fellow I was when we talked about ambitions and you sympathised with me. I think I should like to take up those ambitions again, if it is not too late. I am sick and weary of the Profession

of Pleasure. I have wasted five good years, but perhaps they can be retrieved. Let me, if possible, burnish up that silver, expand the shrinking shoe, renew those dreams.'

'Do you mean it? Are you strong enough? Oh! You have fallen so low. Are you strong enough to rise?'

'I don't know. If the event should prove—if that slipper should enlarge again—if it should once more fit your foot——'

'If! Oh! how can a man say *if*, when he ought to say *shall*?'

'The slipper *shall* enlarge,' he said quietly, but with as much determination as one can expect from an Emeritus Professor of Pleasure.

'When it does, then come again. Till then, do not, if you please, seek me out in my obscurity. It would only be the final destruction of a renewed hope. Farewell, Sir Geoffrey.'

'*Au revoir*. Not farewell.'

He stooped and kissed her hand and left her.

QUARANTINE ISLAND

I

‘No,’ he cried, passionately. ‘You drew me on : you led me to believe that you cared for me : you encouraged me. What ? Can a girl go on as you have done without meaning anything ? Does a girl allow a man to press her hand—to keep her hand—without meaning anything ? Unless these things mean nothing, you are the most heartless girl in the whole world ; yes—I say the coldest, the most treacherous, the most heartless !’ It was evening, and moonlight ; a soft and delicious night in September. The waves lapped gently at their feet, the warm breeze played upon their faces, the moon shone upon them—an evening wholly unfit for such a royal rage as this young gentleman—two-and-twenty is still young—exhibited. He walked about on the parade, which was deserted, except for this solitary pair, gesticulating, waving his arms, mad with the madness of wounded love.

She sat on one of the seaside benches, her hands clasped, her head bent, overwhelmed and frightened and remorseful. He went on—he recalled the day when first they met ; he reminded her of the many, many ways in which she had led him on to believe that she cared for him ; he accused her of making him love her in order to laugh at him. When he could

find nothing more to say he flung himself upon the bench, but on the other end of it, and crossed his arms, and dropped his head upon them. So that there were two on the bench : one at either end, and both with their heads dropped—a pretty picture, in the moonlight, of a lovers' quarrel. But this was worse than a lovers' quarrel. It was the end of everything, for the girl was engaged to another man.

She rose. If he had been looking up he would have seen that there were tears in her eyes and on her cheek.

'Mr. Fernie,' she stammered, timidly, 'I suppose there is nothing more to say. I am, no doubt, all that you have called me. I am heartless. I have led you on. Well—but I did not know—how could I tell that you were taking things so seriously? How can you be so angry just because I can't marry you? One girl is no better than another. There are plenty of girls in the world. I thought you liked me, and, I—but what is the use of talking? I am heartless and cold. I am treacherous, and vain, and cruel, and—and—won't you shake hands with me once more, Claude, before we part?'

'No! I will never shake hands with you again; never—never! By heavens! nothing that could happen now would ever make me shake hands with you again. I hate you, I loathe you, I shudder at the sight of you, I could not forgive you—never! You have ruined my life. Shake hands with you! Who but a heartless and worthless woman could propose such a thing?'

She shivered and shook at his wild words. She could not, as she said, understand the vehemence of

the passion that held the man. He was more than half mad, and she was only half sorry. Forgive the girl. She was only seventeen, just fresh from her governess. She was quite innocent and ignorant. She knew nothing about the reality and the vehemence of passion; she thought that they had been very happy together. Claude, to be sure, was ridiculously fond of taking her hand; once he kissed her head to show the depth of his friendship; he was such a good companion; they had had such a pleasant time; it was a dreadful pity that he should be so angry. Besides, it was not as if she liked the other man, who was old and horrid.

‘Good-bye, then, Claude,’ she said. ‘Perhaps, when we meet again, you will be more ready to forgive me. Oh!’ she laughed, ‘it is so silly that a man like you, a great, strong, clever, handsome man, should be so foolish over a girl. Besides, you ought to know that a girl can’t have things her own way always. Good-bye, Claude. Won’t you shake hands?’ She laid her hand upon his shoulder; just touched it; turned—and fled.

II

SHE had not far to go. The villa where she lived was within five minutes’ walk. She ran in and found her mother alone in the drawing-room.

‘My dear,’ the mother said irritably, ‘I wish to goodness you wouldn’t run out after dinner. Where have you been?’

‘Only into the garden, and to look at the sea.’

‘There’s Sir William in the dining-room still.’

‘Let him stay there, mother dear. He’ll drink up

all the wine and go to sleep, perhaps, and then we shall be rid of him.'

'Go in, Florence, and bring him out. It isn't good for him, at his age, to drink so much.'

'Let the servants go,' the girl replied, rebellious.

'My dear—your own accepted lover. Have you no right feeling? Oh! Florence, and when I am so ill, and you know—I told you——'

'A woman should not marry her grandfather. I've had more than enough of him to-day already. You made me promise to marry him. Until I do marry him he may amuse himself. As soon as we are married, I shall fill up all the decanters, and keep them full, and encourage him to drink as much as ever he possibly can.'

'My dear, are you mad?'

'Oh! no; I believe I have only just come to my senses. Mad? No. I have been mad. Now, when it is too late, I am sane. When it is too late—when I have just understood what I have done.'

'Nonsense, child! What do you mean by being too late? Besides, you are doing what every girl does. You have accepted the hand of an old man who can give you a fine position, and a great income, and every kind of luxury. What more can a girl desire? When I die—you know already—there will be nothing—nothing at all for you. Marriage is your only chance.'

At this moment the door opened, and Sir William himself appeared. He was not, although a man so rich and therefore so desirable, quite a nice old man to look at; not quite such an old man as a girl would fall in love with at first sight; but, perhaps, under the

surface there lay unsuspected virtues by the dozen. He was short and fat; his hair was white; his face was red; he had great white eyebrows; he had thick lips; his eyes rolled unsteadily, and his shoulders lurched; he had taken much more wine than is good for a man of seventy.

He held out both hands and lurched forwards. 'Florenshe,' he said, thickly, 'let's sit down together somewhere. Letsh talk, my dear.'

The girl slipped from the proffered hands and fled from the room.

'Whatsh matter with the girl?' said Sir William.

III

Out at sea—all by itself—somewhere about thirty miles from a certain good-sized island in a certain ocean, there lies another little island—an eyot—about a mile long and half a mile broad. It is a coral islet. The coral reef stretches out all round it, except in one or two places where the rock shelves suddenly, making it possible for a ship to anchor there. The islet is flat, but all round it runs a kind of natural sea wall, about ten feet high and as many broad; behind it, on the side which the wall protects from the prevailing wind, is a little grove of low, stunted trees, the name and kind of which the successive tenants of the island have never been curious to ascertain, I am, therefore, unable to tell you what they are. The area protected by the sea wall, as low as the sea level, was covered all over with long, rank grass. At the north end of the islet a curious round rock, exactly like a martello tower, but rather higher, rose

out of the water, separated from the sea wall by twenty or thirty feet of deep water, dark blue, transparent; sometimes rolling and rushing and tearing at the sides of the rock, sometimes gently lifting the sea-weed that clung to the sides. Round the top of the rock flew, screaming all the year round, the sea birds. Far away on the horizon, like a blue cloud, one could see land; it was the larger island to which this place belonged. At the south end was a lighthouse, built just like all lighthouses, with low, white buildings at its foot, and a flagstaff, and an enclosure, which was a feeble attempt at a flower garden. You may see a lighthouse exactly like it at Broadstairs. In fact it is a British lighthouse. Half a mile from the lighthouse, where the sea wall broadened into a wide level space, there was a wooden house of four rooms—dining-room, *salon*, and two bedrooms. It was a low house, provided with a verandah on either side. The windows had no glass in them, but there were thick shutters in case of hurricanes. There were doors to the rooms, but they were never shut. Nothing was shut, or locked up, or protected. On the inner, or land, side there was a garden in which roses—a small red rose—grew in quantities, and a few English flowers. The Elephant Creeper, with its immense leaves, clambered up the verandah poles and over the roof. There was a small plot of ground planted with pine apples, and a solitary banana tree stood under the protection of the house, its leaves blown to shreds, its head bowed down.

Beyond the garden was a collection of three or four huts, where lived the Indian servants and their families.

The residents of this retreat—this secluded earthly paradise—were these Indian servants with their wives and children; the three lighthouse men, who messed together; and the captain, governor, or commander-in-chief, who lived in the house all by himself, because he had no wife or family.

Now, the remarkable thing about this island is that, although it is so far from any other inhabited place, and although it is so small, the human occupants number many thousands. With the exception of the people above-named, these thousands want nothing: neither the light of the day nor the warmth of the sun; neither food nor drink. They lie side by side under the rank grass, without headstones or even graves to mark their place; without a register or record of their departure; without even coffins! There they lie—sailors, soldiers, coolies, negroes—forgotten and lost, as much as if they had never been born. And if their work lives after them, nobody knows what that work is. They belong to the vast army of the Anonymous. Poor Anonymous! They do all the work. They grow our corn and breed our sheep; they make and mend for us. They build up our lives for us. We never know them, nor thank them, nor think of them. All over the world, they work for their far-off brethren; and when one dies, we know not, because another takes his place. And at the last a mound of green grass, or even nothing but an undistinguished strip of ground!

Here lay, side by side, the Anonymous—thousands of them. Did I say they were forgotten? Not quite; they are remembered by the two or three Indian

women, wives of the Indian servants, who live there. At sunset they and their children retreat to their huts, and stay in them till sunrise next morning. They dare not so much as look outside the door, because the place is crowded with white, shivering, sheeted ghosts! Speak to one of these women: she will point out to you, trembling, one—two—half a dozen ghosts. It is true that the dull eye of the Englishman can see nothing. She sees them—distinguishes them one from the other. She can see them every night; yet she can never overcome her terror. The governor, or captain, or commander-in-chief, for his part sees nothing. He sleeps in his house quite alone, with his cat and his dog, windows and doors wide open, and has no fear of any ghosts. If he felt any fear, of course, he would be surrounded and pestered to death every night with multitudes of ghosts. But he fears nothing. He is a doctor, you see; and no doctor ever yet was afraid of ghosts.

How did they come here—this huge regiment of dead men? In several ways. Cholera accounts for most; yellow fever for some; other fevers for some; but for most cholera has been the destroyer. Because, you see, this is Quarantine Island. If a ship has cholera or any other infectious disease on board, it cannot touch at the island close by, which is a great place for trade, and has every year a quantity of ships calling; the infected ship has to betake herself to Quarantine Island, where her people are landed, and where they stay until she has a clear bill; and that, sometimes, is not until the greater part of her people have changed their berths on board for permanent lodgings ashore. Now you understand.

The place is a great cemetery. It lies under the hot sun of the tropics. The sky is always blue ; the sun is always hot. It is girdled by the sea. It is always silent, for the Indian children do not laugh or shout, and the Indian women are too much awed by the presence of the dead to wrangle—always silent, save for the crying of the sea-birds on the rock. There are no letters, no newspapers, no friends, no duties—none, save when a ship puts in, and then, for the doctor, farewell rest, farewell sleep, until the bill of health is clean. Once a fortnight or so, if the weather permits, and if the communications are open—that is, if there is no ship there—a boat arrives from the big island with rations, and letters, and supplies. Sometimes a visitor comes, but not often, because, should an infected ship put in, he would have to stay as long as the ship. A quiet, peaceful, monotonous life for one who is weary of the world, or for a hermit ; and as good as the top of a pillar for silence and for meditation.

IV

THE islet lay all night long in much the same silence which lapped and wrapped it all the day. The water washed musically upon the shore : the light in the lighthouse flashed at intervals—there was no other sign of life. Towards six o'clock in the morning the dark east grew grey ; thin, long, white rays shot out across the sky, and then the light began to spread. Before the grey turned to pink, or the pink to crimson ; before there was any corresponding glow in the western sky, the man who occupied the bungalow turned out of bed, and came forth to the

verandah clad in the silk pyjamas and silk jacket, which formed the evening, or dress suit, in which he slept. The increasing light showed that he was a young man still, perhaps about thirty—a young man with a strong and resolute face, and a square forehead. He stood under the verandah watching, as he had done every day for two years and more, the break of day and the sunrise. He drank in the delicious breeze, cooled by a thousand miles and more of ocean. No one knows the freshness and sweetness of the air until he has so stood in the open and watched the dawn of a day in the tropics. He went back to the house and came out again clad in a rough suit of tweeds and a helmet. His servant was waiting for him with his morning tea. He drank it, and sallied forth. By this time the shortlived splendour of the East was fast broadening to right and left, until it stretched from pole to pole. Suddenly the sun leaped up, and the colours fled and the splendour vanished. The sky became all over a deep, clear blue, and round and about the sun was a brightness which no eye but that of the sea bird can face and live. The man in the helmet turned to the seashore, and walked briskly along the natural mound, or sea wall. Now and then he stepped down upon the white coral sand, picked up a shell, looked at it, and threw it away. When he came to the Sea Birds' Rock he sat down, and watched it. In the deep water below sea snakes, red and purple and green, were playing about; the blue fish, who are not in the least afraid of the snakes, rolled lazily round and round the rock; in the recesses lurked unseen the great conger eel, which dreads nothing but the Thing of long and horny tentacles, the ourite or squid; round

and round the rock darted the humorous tazar, which bites the bathers in shallow waters all for fun and mischief, and with no desire at all to eat their flesh ; and besides these a thousand curious creatures, which this man, who had trained his eyes by days and days of watching, came here every day to look at. While he stood there the sea bird took no manner of notice of him, flying close about him, lighting on the shore close at his feet. They were intelligent enough to know that he was only dangerous with a gun in his hand. Presently he got up and continued his walk. All round the sea wall of the island measures about three miles. He took this walk every morning and every evening in the early cool and the late. The rest of the time he spent indoors.

When he got back it was nearly seven, and the day was growing hot. He took his towels, went down to the shore, to a place where the coral reef receded, leaving a channel out to the open. The channel swarmed with sharks, but he bathed there every morning, keeping in the shallow water while the creatures watched him from the depths beyond with longing eyes. He wore a pair of slippers, on account of the láf, which is a very pretty little fish indeed to look at, but he lurks in dark places near the shore, and he is too lazy to get out of the way, and if you put your foot near him, he sticks out his dorsal fin, which is prickly and poisoned, and when a man gets that into the sole of his foot, he goes home and cuts his leg off, and has to pretend that he lost it in action.

When he had bathed, the doctor went back to his house, and performed some simple additions to his toilette. That is to say, he washed the salt water out of his hair and beard—not much else. As to collars

neckties, braces, waistcoats, black coats, rings, or any such gewgaws, they were not wanted on this island. Nor are watches and clocks; the residents go by the sun. The doctor got up at daybreak, and took his walk, as you have seen, and his bath. He was then ready for his breakfast, and for a solid meal, in which fresh fish, newly caught that morning, and curried chicken, with claret and water, formed the principal part. A cup of coffee came after, with a cigar and a book on the verandah. By this time the sun was high, and the glare of forenoon had succeeded the coolness of the dawn. After the cigar the doctor went indoors. The room was furnished with a few pictures, a large bookcase full of books, chiefly medical, a table covered with papers, and two or three chairs. No curtains, carpets, or blinds; the doors and windows wide open to the verandah on both sides.

He sat down and began writing—perhaps he was writing a novel. I think no one could think of a more secluded place for writing a novel. Perhaps he was doing something scientific. He continued writing till past midday. When he felt hungry he went into the dining-room, took a biscuit or two and a glass of vermouth. Then, because it was now the hour for repose, and because the air outside was hot, and the sea breeze had dropped to a dead calm, and the sun was like a red-hot glaring furnace overhead, the doctor kicked off his boots, threw off his coat, lay down on a grass mat under the mosquito curtain, and instantly fell fast asleep. About five o'clock he awoke and got up; the heat of the day was over; he took a long draught of cold tea, which is the most refreshing and the coolest drink in the world. The sun was now getting low, and the air was growing

cool. He put on his helmet, and set off again to walk round his domain. This done, he bathed again. Then he went home as the sun sank, and night fell instantly without the intervention of twilight. They served him dinner, which was like his breakfast, but for the addition of some cutlets. He took his coffee, he took a pipe—two pipes, slowly, with a book—he took a whisky and soda—and he went to bed. I have said that he had no watch—it hung idly on a nail—therefore he knew not the time, but it would very likely be about half-past nine. However that might be, he was the last person up in this ghostly Island of the Anonymous Dead.

This doctor, Captain-General and Commandant of Quarantine Island, was none other than the young man who began this history with a row royal and a kingly rage. You think, perhaps, that he had turned hermit in the bitterness of his wrath, and for the faults of one simple girl had resolved on the life of a solitary. Nothing of the kind. He was an army doctor, and he left the service in order to take this very eligible appointment, where one lived free, and could spend nothing except a little for claret. He proposed to stay there for a few years in order to make a little money, by means of which he might become a specialist. This was his ambition. As for that love business, seven years past, he had clean forgotten it, girl and all. Perhaps there had been other tender passages. Shall a man, wasting in despair, die because a girl throws him over? Never! Let him straightway forget her. Let him tackle his work, let him put off the business of love—which can always wait—until he can approach it once more in the proper spirit of illusion, and once more fall to worshipping an angel.

V

NEITHER nature nor civilisation ever designed a man's life to be spent in monotony. Most of us have to work for our daily bread, which is always an episode, and sometimes a pretty dismal episode, to break and mark the day. One day there came such a break in the monotonous round of the doctor's life. It came in the shape of a ship. She was a large steamer, and she steamed slowly.

It was early in the morning, before breakfast. The doctor and one of the lighthouse men stood on the landing-place watching her.

'She's in quarantine, doctor, sure as sure,' said the man. 'I wonder what's she's got. Fever, for choice. Cholera, more likely. Well, we take our chance.'

'She's been in bad weather,' said the doctor, looking at her through his glass. 'Look, she's lost her mizzen, and her bows are stove in. I wonder what's the meaning of it. She's a transport.' She drew nearer. 'Troops! Well, I'd rather have soldiers than coolies.'

She was a transport. She was full of soldiers, time-expired men and invalids going home. She was bound from Calcutta to Portsmouth. She had met with a cyclone; driven out of her course and battered, she was making for the nearest port when cholera broke out on board.

Before nightfall the island was dotted with white tents; a hospital was rigged up with the help of the ship's spars and canvas. The men were all ashore, and the quarantine doctor, with the ship's doctor, was

hard at work among the cases, and the men were dropping in every direction.

Among the passengers were a dozen ladies and some children. The doctor gave up his house to them, and retired to a tent, or to the lighthouse, or anywhere to sleep. Much sleep could not be expected for some time to come. He saw the boat land with the ladies on board; he took off his hat as they walked past. There were old ladies, middle-aged ladies, young ladies. Well, there always is this combination. Then he went on with his work. But he had a curious sensation, as if something of the past had been revived in his mind. It is, however, not an uncommon feeling. And one of the ladies changed colour when she saw him.

Then began the struggle for life. No more monotony in Quarantine Island. Right and left, all day long, the men fell one after the other; day after day more men fell, more men died. The two doctors quickly organised their staff. The ship's officers became clinical clerks, some of the ladies became nurses. And the men, the rough soldiers, sat about in their tents with pale faces, expecting. Of those ladies who worked there was one—who never seemed weary, never wanted rest, never asked for relief. She was at work all day and all night in the hospital; if she went out it was only to cheer up the men outside. The doctor was but conscious of her work and of her presence, he never spoke to her; when he came to the hospital another nurse received him; if he passed her she seemed always to turn away. At a less troubled time he would have observed this. At times he felt again that odd sensation of a recovered past, but he

regarded it not—he had other things to consider. There is no time more terrible for the courage of the stoutest man than a time of cholera on board ship or in a little place whence there is no escape; no time worse for a physician than one when his science is mocked and his skill avails nothing. Day after day the doctor fought from morning till night and far on to the morning again; day after day new graves were dug; day after day the chaplain read over the new-made graves the service of the dead for the gallant lads who thus died, inglorious, for their country.

There came a time, at last, when the conqueror seemed tired of conquest. He ceased to strike. The fury of the disease spent itself; the cases happened singly, one or two a day, instead of ten or twenty; the sick began to recover, they began to look about them. The single cases ceased; the pestilence was stayed; and they sat down to count the cost. There had been on board the transport three hundred and seventy-five men, thirty-two officers, half a dozen ladies, a few children, and the ship's crew. Twelve officers, two of the ladies, and a hundred men had perished when the plague abated.

‘One of your nurses is ill, doctor.’

‘Not cholera, I do hope.’

‘No, I believe a kind of collapse. She is at the bungalow. I told them I would send you over.’

‘I will go at once.’

He left a few directions and walked over to the house. It was, he found, the nurse who had been of all the most useful and the most active. She was now lying hot and feverish, her mind wandering, inclined to ramble in her talk. He laid his hand

upon her temples ; he felt her pulse ; he looked upon her face ; the odd feeling of something familiar struck him again. ' I don't think it is very much,' he said. ' A little fever. She may have been in the sun ; she has been working too hard ; her strength has given way.' He still held her wrist.

' Claude,' murmured the sick girl, ' you are very cruel. I didn't know—and a girl cannot always have her own way.'

Then he recognised her.

' Good Heavens ! ' he cried, ' it is Florence ! '

' Not always have her own way,' she repeated. ' If I could have my own way, do you think I would—— ? '

' Florence,' he said again, ' and I did not even recognise her. Strange ! '

Another of the ladies, the colonel's wife, was standing beside him.

' You know her, doctor ? '

' I knew her a long time ago—some years ago—before she married.'

' Married ? Florence is not married. You must be thinking of someone else.'

' No. This is Florence Vernon, is it not ? Yes. Then she was formerly engaged to marry a certain Sir William Duport.'

' Oh ! I believe there was some talk about an old man who wanted to marry her. But she wouldn't have him. It was just before her mother died. Did you know her mother ? '

' I knew her mother a little when they were living at Eastbourne. So she refused the old man, did she ? and has remained unmarried. Curious ! I had almost forgotten her. The sight of her brings back

the old days. Well, after she has pulled so gallantly through the cholera, we cannot have her beaten by a little fever. Refused the old man, did she ?'

In the dead of night he sat watching by the bedside, the colonel's wife with him.

'I had almost forgotten,' whispered the lady, 'that story of the old baronet. She told me about it once. Her mother was ill and anxious about her daughter, because she had next to nothing, except an annuity. The old man offered ; he was an unpleasant old man ; but there was a fine house and everything ; it was all arranged. The girl was quite a child, and understood nothing. She was to be sold, in fact, to this old person, who ought to have been thinking of his latter end, instead of a pretty girl. Then the mother died suddenly, and the girl broke it off. She was a clever girl, and she has been teaching. For the last three years she has been in India, now she is going home under my charge. She is a brave girl, doctor, and a good girl. She has received half a dozen offers, but she has refused them all. So I think there must be somebody at home.'

'Claude,' murmured the girl, wandering, 'I never thought you would care so much. If I had thought so, I would not have encouraged you. Indeed, indeed, I would not. I thought we were only amusing ourselves.'

'Claude is a pretty name. What is your own Christian name, doctor ?' asked the colonel's wife, curiously.

'It is—in fact—it is—Claude,' he replied blushing ; but there was not enough light to see his blushes.

'Dear me !' said the colonel's wife.

VI

A FEW days later the patient, able to sit for a while in the shade of the verandah, was lying in a long cane chair. Beside her sat the colonel's wife, who had nursed her through the attack. She was reading aloud to her. Suddenly she stopped. 'Here comes the doctor,' she said, 'and, Florence, my dear, his name, you know, is Claude. I think you have got something to talk about with Claude besides the symptoms.' With these words she laughed, nodded her head, and ran into the *salon*.

The verandah, with its green blinds of cane hanging down, and its matting on the floor, and its easy-chairs and tables, made a pretty room to look at. In the twilight the fragile figure, pale, thin, dressed in white, would have lent interest even to a stranger. To the doctor, I suppose, it was only a 'case.' He pushed the blinds aside and stepped in, strong, big, masterful. 'You are much better,' he said; 'you will very soon be able to walk about. Only be careful for a few days. It was lucky that the attack came when it did, and not a little earlier, when we were in the thick of the trouble. Well, you won't want me much longer, I believe.'

'No, thank you,' she murmured, without raising her eyes.

'I have had no opportunity,' he said, standing over her, 'of explaining that I really did not know who you were, Miss Vernon. Somehow, I didn't see your face, or I was thinking of other things; I suppose you had forgotten me; anyhow, it was not until the other day, when I was called in, that I

remembered. But I daresay you have forgotten me.'

'No; I have not forgotten.'

'I thought that long ago you had become Lady Duport.'

'No, that did not take place.'

'I hear that you have been teaching since your mother's death. Do you like it?'

'Yes, I like it.'

'Do you remember the last time we met—on the seashore—do you remember, Florence?' His voice softened suddenly. 'We had a quarrel about that old villain—do you remember?'

'I thought you had forgotten such a little thing as that long ago, and the girl you quarrelled with.'

'The point is rather whether you remember. That is of much more importance.'

'I remember that you swore that you would never forgive a worthless girl who had ruined your life. Did I ruin your life, Doctor Fernie?'

He laughed. He could not honestly say that she had. In fact, his life, so far as concerned his work, had gone on much about the same. But, then, such a man does not allow love to interfere with his career.

'And then you went and threw over the old man. Florence, why didn't you tell me that you were going to do that? You might have told me.'

She shook her head. 'Until you fell into such a rage, and called me such dreadful names, I did not understand.'

'Why didn't you tell me, Florence?' he repeated.

She shook her head again.

‘You were only a little innocent, ignorant child then,’ he said; ‘of course you could not understand. I was an ass and a brute and a fool not to know.’

‘You said you would never forgive me. You said you would never shake hands with me again.’

He held out his hand. ‘Since,’ he said, ‘you are not going to marry the old man, and since you are not engaged to anybody else, why—then—in that case—the old state of things is still going on—and—and—Florence—but if you give me your hand, I shall keep it, mind.’

‘Dear me,’ said the colonel’s wife, standing in the doorway. ‘Do quarantine doctors always kiss their patients? But you told me, doctor dear, that your Christian name was Claude. Didn’t you? That explains everything.’

The ship, with those of her company whom the plague had spared, presently steamed away, and, after being repaired, made her way to Portsmouth Dockyard. But one of her company stayed behind, and now is Queen or Empress of the island of which her husband is King, Captain, Commandant, and Governor-General, and also resident Quarantine Doctor.

IN THREE WEEKS

I

‘THAT will do,’ said the physician. ‘Sit down.’

The patient obeyed in silence. The physician turned to the table and replaced his instrument. He was longer over this than seemed necessary.

‘You think?’ asked the patient, coldly.

‘You are twenty-four.’ The physician faced his patient with cold eyes. ‘You are made, you think, for a long life. Your parents were killed in an accident; otherwise they might have lived to an old age; your people for generations have all been long-lived. Yes; you seem framed for the attainment of old age. Yet—there are chances—there are flaws—no one must count upon the outward promise of longevity. There is no certainty; there are germs in the air—in the water——’

‘You think—then?’ the patient interrupted without the least appearance of discomposure or anxiety.

‘What I think, young gentleman, is this—you are so strong that you are brave enough to face the truth.’

‘I hope so.’

‘Then, sir, you *will be dead in three weeks.*’

There was silence for a space. The patient received this intelligence with steady look. He flinched

not: nor did his cheek turn pale. He got up slowly, and began to walk about the room, looking at the pictures, taking up trifles from the mantelshelf, as one does when the mind is greatly preoccupied. Then he turned suddenly to the doctor. 'You are quite sure of what you say?'

'I am quite sure.'

'You are an old man. You have seen thousands of cases. With your experience a mistake is impossible.'

'It is—humanly speaking—impossible. For one of my experience, such a mistake is—humanly speaking—impossible.'

'And there is no loophole—no chance—of escape?'

'While there is life there is always a chance. In your case the locality of the mischief cannot be reached. You must die.'

'Thank you,' said the patient. 'It is rather a pity that I did not know of this a week ago. You might then have saved——' He stopped short, with a choke in his voice. It was the only outward sign of emotion. 'Thank you,' he repeated, laying an envelope with a cheque in it on the table. 'I will not take up more of your time. And my own is too short to be wasted.'

The physician looked out of the window. The young man walked across the street, and, with head erect and springing gait, marched down the pavement.

'One would say he had a hundred years before him,' said the physician. 'And he is only twenty-four. And wealthy, he told me. And ambitious, I should think. And able, I am sure. All the world before this unfortunate young man; and he must die at the very outset. And some poor weakling, whom nobody wants, will be kept alive till seventy! Humph!

There he goes, marching like a sergeant of the Guards. Round the corner now.' The physician returned to his fire—it was a cold morning—he was an old man : he sat down for a moment and warmed his hands. 'Twenty-four,' he said, 'and I am seventy-four. The world is very unequal. That's the chief charm about it. Without uncertainty, life would be too monotonous. The young man took it bravely.' He got up and prepared for the reception of another patient. 'They are braver than they were : they used to take it fainting ; or they took it sighing, crying, sobbing, blubbering or they prayed for life at any cost—at any suffering—Ah ! I've witnessed curious cowardice in my time. Now they can't bear pain, and they won't have it—not the least bit of pain. But they don't mind dying. Odd change ! Worse nerves and more courage.'

Wrong, most learned physician. They mind dying very much, and at any age, but men are not so horribly afraid of the silent and lonely journey as they were. Perhaps the young mind dying less than the old, because they are not so bound by the delights and vanities of this, on-the-whole-and-after-due-deductions-made, happy life. But they don't really like dying, and they never will, so long as the step is made out of light and companionship and sunshine into—whatever is to follow—by a dark and solitary way.

The young man, then, walked away with a steady carriage and an elastic step. These formed part of himself ; he would have walked to the scaffold with the same step—in fact, he was walking to the scaffold. Yet he was as heavy of heart as a young man can well be. Three weeks—three short weeks—and all would

be over ; the world—strange thing—never to be understood, even by the most useless—would go on henceforth, that is, after three weeks—absolutely without him—for ever, without thinking any more about him ! Poor world ! Unfortunate world ! Daily robbed, thus untimely, of its chief hope and promise ! Heavy of heart or not, he walked to his club and took a light lunch, and then went to his chambers, where he lit a cigar and sat down to think. Only three weeks left !

II

‘ A LONG rope, my lord,’ the condemned criminal used to pray the judge. Three weeks was thought a reasonably long rope. Whatever the length of the rope, it was counted short towards the end, when only the last hours of waiting seemed long. Gilbert—the Christian name of this *condamné* was Gilbert—had a rope three weeks long, and it seemed at first a reasonable time within which to make the necessary dispositions. At this, the very beginning of the limited period, the young man was surprised to find himself neither dismayed, as many would be ; nor disgusted, as he had a right to be ; nor terrified ; nor in a rage. He was as yet, he said to himself, insensible to the greatness of the disaster : that, he thought, would grow upon him day by day—the doubtful step out of the light into the dark, the terrors of the tomb, the lonely journey, the sudden abandonment of all his hopes, the loss of love, and the sorrow that would fall upon others.

He was a New Zealander by birth, and an only son, and an orphan, and very comfortably endowed with wealth. That is, he could live in clubland, or

in Bayswaterland, or in West Kensingtonland, without doing any work at all. And he had ambitions. He had English relations, but they did not know how rich he was, and thought that a poor colonial cousin would probably be a nuisance in a respectable family. Therefore they gave him the cousinly cold shoulder. He had friends in plenty, such friends as a clever young fellow readily makes at Cambridge: he believed in them, and they believed in him: he believed that his friends were the coming men, and much finer fellows than the existing lot: they believed the same of him. They further believed that to be thirty years of age was to be advanced in life, and that to be still working after fifty was a scandalous invasion of the rights of the grave. You understand exactly, therefore, what manner of man he was.

Young, rich, strong, capable, ambitious, and he had to leave the Banquet of Life at twenty-four! There wanted but one thing more—and that, too, was granted! He was to leave Love behind him!

He was a happy lover: made happy exactly a week before this dreadful thing fell upon him. The name of the girl was Violet. I think, if his thoughts had turned in the direction of Violet just when the physician told him the truth about his case, he would have taken it fainting. Fortunately, he only began to think of her now, in his own rooms alone, when he was beginning to understand a little. It takes time, you see, for a man to discover the meaning of any event. Most of us never do succeed in understanding what any event means—birth, belongings, disease, loss—so that all the consequences, which are absolutely certain and unavoidable, fall upon us as so

many distinct and separate operations of fate and indictiveness.

When he did think of his girl, and of the grief that would fall upon her, he—well—forgive him. Love makes a man weak as well as strong—*lacrymis se tradidit*. It sounds more manly in Latin. Violet, he said, was all affection, a creature of pure affection: she was all constancy and truth: she was wholly his: she had given her heart to him for life or death: she would never—never—get over it. He saw in imagination her widowed form, graceful even in grief, kneeling beside his tomb year after year. Again—*lacrymis se tradidit*. Does it not look better in the dead language?

He was a man quick to resolve. He made up his mind at once what was best to be done. Since they must part, let them part at once: let there be no leave-taking—horrible, acute, agonising: let the end be made, and the knot cut, at once.

He dried his unmanly tears and sat down to write. A hard thing to do: but he did it—and this is part of his letter. It began with things sacred to Love—things that should never be copied out and printed.

‘I shall take with me,’ he said, after explanations, ‘where I am going, the undying memory of this last week of boundless happiness. Whenever I may be ordered to go—I know not what my new country will be like—there can be no joy comparable to the joy of loving you. I shall take that memory away with me at least. All the memories of my life may be forgotten, but I shall keep this one. My dear, I am going on a long journey: I must go very soon: I must go alone—quite alone. I cannot even take you with me. I

would not if I could. You must remain and forget me, and rejoice in your youth, and in your beauty, and in your goodness. My dear angel, you would have made me, perhaps, in the long run, even like yourself, because you could have made me what you please, and nothing short of your own purity and sweetness and goodness would have satisfied you. My saint! it may be that beyond the tomb I may yet rise to your level, and stand beside you when you follow me. Dearest Violet, this is the last letter you will receive from me. In kindness to you it will be best that I should not see you again before I go. Another communication you will have respecting certain wishes of mine, but this is the last letter you will have from me. Farewell, my love—farewell!

‘I repeat, I am doomed to die. There can be no doubt. I have had symptoms—which should have disquieted me—for some time past. I have now consulted a physician, Sir Christopher Fairlight. He says that I shall be dead in three weeks. I shall go away, therefore, and take a lodging somewhere, and die alone. Do not, my dear, try to see me. Do not answer this letter. Say to yourself, “He is dead.” And, so saying, try to forget me, and be happy again. Say “He is dead,” and be happy again. That is all. Farewell!—G.’

III

VIOLET received this letter at breakfast. She read it with an expression of the greatest bewilderment, but not the least grief, dismay, or affliction. ‘George,’ she said to her brother, tossing him the letter, ‘read that.’

George did read it. 'Well?' asked his sister, 'what does he mean? He was here the day before yesterday as well as a man can be. And, as usual, full of his stupid ambitions. What does it mean?'

'It means,' George replied, 'either what it says—in which case, Violet, I must see him at once, because, you see, he ought to do something for you. It's very sudden. Poor beggar! I wonder if it is really—upon my word it's a very sad letter—but you don't seem to mind much. He's very fond of you—this letter shows that he's a fool about you'—Violet nodded—'and—and—I think he ought to do something very handsome indeed for you. Or, perhaps—but I can't think—it means that he's going to bolt and break it off.'

'It doesn't mean that, George, unless he's found out something—Bob, you know.'

'Humph! Perhaps—well—I will take a cab to his chambers and catch him at once.'

The maiden, all affection and constancy, took a kidney and a piece of toast. 'I think it's a real letter, and that he's got to sit down and die. It must be horrid for him. But he will do what you like about me, George—and—remember—don't be too bashful. He's got piles of money. If you can't get a satisfactory will out of him—why—I had better have stuck to my dear old Bob. And mind, George, don't ask me to pretend, because I won't. If you bring him to reason—that way—I shall be glad of it. Glad, mind.'

But when her brother called, the tenant of the chambers was gone. Where? His servants did not know. There was no address for letters. Probably the master would be back in a day or two.

IV

‘BOB!’ she cried, springing up and running to meet him with every outward sign of joy, and with the flushed excitement of one who has news—news surprising and of great joy—to communicate. ‘I *am* so glad to see you. You got my telegram? Of course. I was afraid you wouldn’t come. I thought you might be cross—you know you were very cross a week ago. I thought you would rather go out to——’ she imitated the dealing of cards. ‘Eh?’

‘No, Violet. I got your telegram, and I saw there must be something up. What is it? Are you tired of your conquest yet? What is it? I am rather surprised too. I thought that henceforth we were to meet—in the giddy crowd and the heartless throng, you know—as strangers. Eh?’ The speaker was a young man, thin and spare, smooth-faced, clever-looking, and, unless his whole appearance belied him, one addicted to the gauds and pomps and hollow delights of this unsatisfying world, also one who had often trodden the flags of Piccadilly Pavement. ‘You look as if something had happened. By Jove, Violet, you look your old self, as if you had had a pint of champagne, and were ready to say something wicked. When I saw you last it was the shrinking wood Violet. Now it’s the—the gaudy Gardenia! But what is it?’

‘Something *has* happened. Oh! You will never guess—never—you couldn’t guess.’

‘Something good, for once, to judge by your looks. Well, I’m not in a hurry. Anything good is worth waiting for.’ He sat down, stretched out his legs, and drove his hands into his pockets.

‘Bob,’ the girl began, flushing a rosy red, ‘I never pretended—to you—to care for Gilbert a bit, did I?’

Bob sat up, and took his hands out of his pockets.

‘Is it off then, Violet?’

‘Wait—did I pretend?’

‘To me? No, you never did. You always told me that I’d got your heart, which wasn’t much good—as we agreed—if the rest of you was going to the other fellow. To him, of course, you didn’t quite say that.’

‘Of course. I had to pretend. He asked me every day if I loved him, and I stood so—your shrinking wood Violet, you know.’ She clasped her hands and hung her pretty head and looked up with limpid eyes full of modesty and sweet maidenly love. ‘You’re a little devil,’ said Bob. ‘Like that,’ continued the girl. ‘Then Gilbert used to heave a sigh, and began to talk about his ambitions. Oh! How truly awful it would have been to be every day and all day long with a man who could talk about nothing but his ambitions. Said he wasn’t good enough to talk to me—to me, Bob, after you’d been making love to me!—about anything but the higher aspirations of the soul! How long, do you think, before he would have found it out?’

‘Would have found it out!’ repeated Bob. ‘Then it is off.’

‘Yes—I got this letter yesterday morning. Read it. When I read it I said to my brother, “George, it’s no use pretending, I’m glad of it.” That is what I said. George walked over to the Albany at once; but Gilbert was gone. George said that something

ought to be done for me : and—but read the letter first.'

Bob read it. Once or twice he glanced at the girl curiously. He was but a young fellow about town who thought of nothing but what his like call pleasure, but the letter touched him. He handed it back. 'I understand now,' he said. 'You never did care a bit for him. You hated him. Otherwise—well—it's a straightforward letter, Violet. He's a good fellow, and he has spared you a mighty lot of trouble in refusing to see you. It's a most considerate letter. Poor beggar ! He was fond of you, and you don't deserve it—well, if it was I who was dying—I'd have you by the bedside, holding my hand all the time for fear you'd go off with somebody else before I was dead—and—hang it, Violet ! I believe I should have killed you, too, so that we might go off together.'

'That's the sort of love I like, Bob,' said the maiden of all virtues. 'Good real love without thinking that a girl is an angel. Do you really think I could have married that thing of ambitions ? You don't want an angel, do you, Bob ?'

'No, I don't. I'm a man of the world, and I want a woman of the world, and we must both want all the good things we can get. Well—but—is this all ? You said—first—I must read that letter. What next ? You are free. But are we any nearer than before ? I'm no richer—but poorer—and the debts are getting more uncomfortable, and——'

'You shall see, Bob. Read this.'

It was a lawyer's letter, stiff and formal. Bob read it slowly. Then he cried, 'Oh, Lord !' as one

in great astonishment. He finished it. He looked up. Violet nodded. 'That's all, Bob.'

'All? Isn't that enough? All? Good Heavens!'

'One of the partners called about eleven o'clock, and placed this in my hands. I wish I'd known he was coming; I would have had the blinds down. As it was I slipped on a black frock, and threw myself on the sofa, and buried my face in my handkerchief. He was much affected, poor man! A good-looking fellow, Bob.'

'I daresay. Perhaps you'd like to be engaged to him, too. It would be another change, wouldn't it? But on what conditions?'

'There are no conditions, except one, which, I'm sure, I shall keep with the greatest joy—not to put on mourning. That's all. No nasty ones about marrying. Perfect confidence in me—perfect you see. That's the real beauty of the thing, isn't it? I've got to forget him, and be happy. I suppose we shall see an announcement in the *Times*, shan't we? After that, Bob, I don't see why——'

'Violet! Eighty thousand pounds!' He held out his arms, and the Violet fell into them, and they kissed and purred delightfully for five long minutes.

'You are a little devil,' said her old lover. It was the greatest praise he had to give, and the greatest she desired. 'Those angelic wood nymph's eyes have done the trick. *What* a good fellow he is! What a pity he couldn't give you the money and go back to his colony and live there! And I say, Violet dear, we'll have the most glorious time.'

'We will, Bob. But remember, I'm not going to

pay your gambling debts. Have your little flutters if you like, but if you get into a hole my money won't put you out; and I'm going my way, and you can go the same way or some other, what you please.'

'All right, my dear. It's more than two thousand a year. We can do pretty well on that, I daresay. Let's have a look at your eyes again. I like 'em, whatever they are, and—and—you're a little devil, Violet, and I love you all the better because you are.'

Thus and thus was the news received. Thus did the girl, who was all affection and all constancy, mourn for the man she had loved so tenderly, who was taken from her so cruelly.

V

IN a little seaside place, quite deserted in the early spring, the condemned man sat in the hotel, which he had all to himself. Before him was a pile of MSS. on which he worked laboriously. He lived the most simple life in order to make as much of his last three weeks as possible. After breakfast, after lunch, before dinner, he walked up and down the sea wall. Contrary to expectation, he was not greatly unhappy. The past life cut off: the disposition of his fortune accomplished: his debts all paid: he found himself looking forward with curiosity and even expectation. Mere dying, he had learned, would be nothing: probably not even a pang: he dreaded somewhat the possible tortures of his complaint. But so far there was no torture. Perhaps this was the worst symptom of all. Often, when a disease has reached the point where it kills, the pain of it dies away. This was no

doubt his case. In a few days he would begin to feel languid : he would no longer be able to walk about : then his intellect would be enfeebled. Lastly, he would lie down and die. As yet he felt quite strong—as strong as ever. Had it not been for the physician's assurance he would have believed himself quite well. Three weeks before him. We have said that he was a young man of ambitions. They were literary, social, and political. He wanted to be everything, which is not uncommon with ambitious young men. He also imagined that he was capable of achieving everything, even the earl's coronet of Benjamin Disraeli, who has so far beaten the record—and this also is not uncommon. Now that he was limited to three weeks of life, all these ambitions were dwarfed down to what he could finish and leave behind him, to be produced after his death. That is why he sat before the pile of MSS. correcting, re-writing, touching.

There were essays, stories, and verses. In reading over these and working at them he forgot his impending end : he even forgot the soft eyes of the girl upon whom his untimely fate would bring a life-long sorrow. At night he remembered them—so soft, so full of light, of lofty thought, of maidenly affection—and—his head in his pillow, he—again to drop into a dead language—*lacrymis se tradidit*. But all day long the fervour of composition and the consideration of his *Opuscula*, by which his memory would live, and the necessity for not wasting a moment, kept him from dwelling upon the inevitable.

But the days passed on. Three weeks became a fortnight. A fortnight became a week. Seven days

became six—five—four—three—two—one. Then came the last night—the twenty-first. Everything was finished, so far as the work of a young man could be finished: he had all his MSS. arranged, and tied up ready for publication, with a preface ‘written on the last day of my life.’ There were instructions to his lawyers. Enough money had been kept over and above that magnificent transfer to the maiden of all constancy and truth to bring out these immortal posthumities at the author’s expense. There was also money left for various purposes and bequests—in fact, three or four thousand pounds were so disposed of. The rest, as you have seen, had been already given to the bereaved and inconsolable *fiancée*.

Midnight. In another twenty-four hours he would be no more. Strange to say, the thought did not disturb his sleep: he dropped off instantly: he slept the whole night through: at eight he awoke. Suddenly he remembered that the three weeks were over, and that this must be the last day of his life: he sprang out of bed: he stood upright: he looked for pains, for languors, for faintings—not at all; he felt perfectly well and strong. But that was often the case—consumptive people, he had heard, often feel very strong on the very morning of their death: it would be so with him.

He dressed with a beating heart and shaky fingers. He looked in the glass. Heavens! Was that the face of a dying man—that, with the ruddy hue of the New Zealand rose upon it, with eyes clear and bright, with cheek full—that? But it must be: there was no hope.

He sat down to breakfast. Nature, though mori-

bund, felt supported, not oppressed, with a plate of ham and eggs. He took a pipe. Nature, though moribund, made no objection. And a walk. Again Nature, though moribund, refused him not. And so on through the day. Every hour he expected the summons: every hour found him as strong and well, to appearance, as ever. Finally, he went to bed fully persuaded, if words said over and over again can persuade one, that he must die in the night.

He lay awake, a light burning, and expected the end. I do not know how long he expected it. In the morning it was past seven when he awoke, feeling not a bit nearer to the promised dissolution.

After breakfast he held a colloquy with himself. 'I was assured,' he said, 'that I had an incurable disease, of which I must die in three weeks at latest. I understood that I should get weaker and worse every day. I am not dead. I am not weaker. I am not worse. And I feel perfectly well.'

He went to consult a practitioner of the town, selecting him by chance. He lighted on a young man of his own age, highly scientific, and, in his own opinion, quite thrown away and wasted in a little place like this.

The young medical man listened patiently. Then he tapped, listened, hammered, squeezed, felt the pulse, looked at the tongue, handled the temples, looked in the eyes, asked a thousand questions. Finally, he said: 'Sir Christopher Fairlight told you so and so? Said you were going to be a dead man in three weeks? Oh! he did, did he?'

'Well?'

'Well, sir, all I can say is—we all make mistakes—

to err is human—Sir Christopher, who has a fine practice still, must be getting on for eighty—and you are at this minute as sound as a bell, without, so far as I can see, the least symptom of any kind or sort of disease upon you, and that you are as likely as not to reach a green old——’

‘Age,’ he would have said, but when the doctor arrived at these words his patient’s cheeks became suddenly white, and he fell headlong, fainting at his feet.

‘Humph!’ said the medical man. ‘Now I expect he didn’t faint when he was told that he must die. I know this sort.’

With the artful aid of science, the man was presently persuaded to come out of his swoon, and after a decent interval for the exhibition of more science, he was allowed to walk away. Walk! He danced away: he ran away—he would have waltzed away but for the look of the thing. And those soft eyes, aglow with love and tenderness and constancy, which he had tried to forget, came back to his mind. He saw them heavy and red with weeping. He longed to dry those tears, to see those eyes once more clear and limpid. With all the speed he could, he bundled his MSS. into his portmanteau and hurried back to London, there to replace hopeless grief and hopeless loss by tender love.

VI

VIOLET was alone. She was a maiden of a poetic nature, which explains the rapture with which she regarded the pile of new things with which she was surrounded. No mourning! It was noble of Gilbert

to give her all his money, and so nicely and quietly : but to insist upon no mourning was most considerate. She was beginning to think quite kindly of him—and as the season of May and June was approaching, Violet was carrying out her dead—or dying—lover's wishes to the letter. She looked at the delightful pile before her, and she felt benevolently disposed towards him. What did he wish her to say ? ' He is dead.' She said these words over and over again. Heliotrope, silver grey, pink, brighter colours even—here they were—' He is dead '—and dainty stuffs, soft stuffs, pretty stuffs. ' He is dead.' Maidens, ye who read these lines, think of the rapture of jumping from nothing a year, with a brother neither too generous nor too rich, into a fortune of 80,000*l.* all your own. It is, at three per cent. only, 2,400*l.* a year. Of course, the first thing must be the renewing of the wardrobe.

Violet had the house to herself: she therefore spread out the things on the dining-room table. And she was standing over them, handling them, holding them up to the light, playing with them, as a miser plays with his gold or a collector with his collection. She was perfectly, serenely, at peace with all the world. Why not? She had got rid of all she disliked—poverty, dependence, and a lover who bored her to death—and she had got in return the man she loved, a man after her own heart, a man of the world and of the town, with whom she would know all the smart people: one on her own moral and intellectual level, whom she understood—there can be no true love where the woman is on one level and the man is on another. Which makes one suspect the stories of the Lord of

Burleigh and the King Cophetua, and reminds one of the story of Esmeralda the gipsy, who brooked not the captivity of the house, but returned to the tents of her own people, and made as if she had no husband.

Violet, therefore, was perfectly happy. Since a recent closing of the scissors by Atropos had resulted in so much happiness to herself, why should she feel regret or pretend to any grief? Suppose, dear reader, that by the death of a person whom you dislike very much—a death that will bring little sorrow to the world—you yourself would be placed in a position of great comfort, be freed from anxiety, and be able to have everything you want, would you lament over such a demise?

The question is too much for us.

Now, while she stood bathed in the afternoon sunshine, lovely to look upon, sweet in her youth and her happiness, she heard a knock at the door—an impatient loud knocking which somehow reminded her—of what? Then there was a step in the hall, and a voice—a voice—at the sound of which she turned pale and sick and faint. And then the door flew open, and there rushed in eager, expectant, his face glowing, his eyes aflame, his lips parted——

‘Gilbert!’ she cried, putting up her hands before her. ‘Gilbert! You are dead!’

‘No—no—no—Violet—I am not dead! Oh! My poor dear—my poor love—you have suffered so much. I have thought of you all the time’—but she kept her arms out before her, and backed as he approached, so that he should not touch her. ‘Violet—am I a ghost?’

‘You are dead, Gilbert—you are dead!’ she replied with white lips.

‘No—no—I tell you. It was a mistake. I am alive and well, Violet, my dear, my child. I have taken you too suddenly.’

‘Gilbert,’ she spoke with hard voice and hard eyes—but she was a girl of great resource—‘you are dead.’

He recoiled. ‘Violet!’ he cried again. He could say nothing more. He knew the truth.

‘You are dead. You sent me word that you were dead. You said I was to forget you and be happy. You transferred all that money to me. You can’t take it back again. You are dead. Go, dead man!’

‘Violet!’

‘I say’—she cleared her throat and spoke more plainly—‘you are dead. I have your money and I mean to keep it.’ She pointed to the door. ‘Go away, dead man.’

‘Violet!’ It was all he could say.

‘You think I loved you. Dead man, you were a fool. I hated you. I was made to take you because you were rich. I am glad now that I did take you, because you are dead and I have got your money. Go away, dead man.’

‘Violet!’

‘Yes. And so that you may be quite sure about it, I am engaged again to my old lover, the only man I ever cared for. Don’t be angry, dead man. Only—Go!’

He turned and walked away without a word. As he opened the door the girl burst into a mocking laugh.

ONE AND TWO

I

‘NELL,’ cried the boy, jumping about, unable to stand still for excitement. ‘It is splendid! He has told me such things as I never dreamed. Oh! splendid things! Wonderful things!’

‘Tell me, Will.’

‘I am ashamed. Well, then, he says—he says’—the boy’s face became crimson—‘he says that I can become whatever I please, if I please. It is all in me—all—all! If I want to be a statesman—I may. If I want to become a judge—I may. If I should like to be a bishop—I may. If a great scholar—a great writer—I may. All, he says, is possible for me, if I choose to work—all—if I choose to work. Oh! Nell— isn’t it— isn’t it wonderful?’ He dropped his voice, and his eyes glistened—his large dreamy eyes—and his cheeks glowed. ‘If I choose to work. As if I should not choose to work! Only those fellows who have got no such glorious prospects are lazy. Work? Why, I am mad to work. I grudge every hour. Work? You shall see how I will work!’

He was a lad of seventeen, handsome, tall, and straight; his eyes were full and limpid; his face was

a long oval, his mouth delicate and fine, but perhaps not quite so firm as might have been desired. At this moment he had just held a conference with his private tutor. It took the form of a remonstrance and an explanation. The remonstrance pointed out that his work was desultory and liable to be interrupted at any moment, for any caprice; that steady grind was incompatible with the giving away of whole mornings to musical dreams at the piano, or to rambles in the woods, a book of poetry in hand. The explanation was to the effect that the great prizes of the world are all within the reach of every clever lad who starts with a sufficiency of means and is not afraid of work; and that he himself—none other—possessed abilities which would justify him in aiming at the very highest. But he must work: he must work: he had been to no school and knew nothing of competitions with other fellows: he must make up for that by hard grind. Think what it may mean to a young fellow of imagination and of dreams, this throwing open of the gates of the Temple of Ambition—this invitation to mount the steps and enter that great and glittering dome. The temple, within, is all glorious with crowns of gold set with precious stones and with crowns of bay and laurel. Day and night ascends a hymn in praise of the living: they themselves—the living who have succeeded—sit on thrones of carved woodwork precious beyond price, and hear and receive this homage all day long. This lad, only by looking in at the open doors, gasped, and blushed, and panted; his colour came and went, his heart beat; he could not stand still.

His companion—they were in a country garden, and it was the spring of the year—was a girl of fifteen,

who hung upon his words and adored him. Some women begin the voluntary servitude to the man they love at a very early age indeed. Nelly at fifteen loved this boy of seventeen as much as if they had both been ten years older.

‘Yes,’ she said, timidly, and the manner of her saying it betrayed certain things. ‘And you will work, Will, won’t you?’

‘Work? Nell, since your father has spoken those words of encouragement, I feel that there is nothing but work left in me—regular work—methodical, systematic work, you know. Grind, grind, grind! No more music, no more singing, no more making rhymes—grind, grind, grind! I say, Nell, I’ve always dreamed, you know——’

‘You have, Will.’

‘And to find that things may actually come true—actually—the finest things that ever I dared to dream—oh!’

‘It is wonderful, Will!’ Both of them began to think that the finest things had already been achieved.

‘It is like having your fortune doubled—trebled—multiplied by ten. Better. If my fortune were multiplied by fifty I could spend no more, I could eat no more, I believe I could do no more with it.’

‘Genius,’ said the girl, blushing, because it really did seem an original thing to say, ‘is better than riches.’

‘It is, it is,’ the possessor of genius replied, with conviction. ‘To have enough is to have all. I can, if I please, become a bishop, a judge, a statesman—anything, anything. Nell,’ his voice dropped, ‘the thought makes me tremble. I feel as if I shall not be

equal to the position. 'There is personal dignity, you know.'

The girl laughed. 'You not equal, Will? Why, you are strong enough for anything.'

'I have made up my mind what to do first of all. When I go to Cambridge I shall take up classics. Of course I must take the highest classical honours. I shall carry off all the University scholarships, and the medals, and the prizes. Oh! and I must speak at the Union. I must lead at the Union, and I must be an athlete.' He was tall and thin, and he stretched out his long arms. 'I shall row in the boat, the 'Varsity boat of course. I shall play in the Eleven.'

'Oh, Will, you are too ambitious.'

'No man,' he said, severely, 'can be too ambitious. I would grasp all. I would sweep the board.'

'And then?'

'Ah! There, I have not yet decided. The Church, to raise the world. The Law, to maintain the social order. The House, to rule the nation. Literature, Science, Art—which?'

'In whatever you do, Will, you are certain to rise to the front rank.'

'Certain. Your father says so. Oh! I feel as if I was already Leader of the House. It is a splendid thing to rule the House. I feel as if I was Lord Chancellor in my robes—on the woolsack. Nothing so grand as to be Lord Chancellor. I feel as if I was Archbishop of Canterbury. It is a most splendid thing, mind you, to be Archbishop of Canterbury. What could be more splendid? He wears lawn sleeves, and he sits in the House of Lords. But I must work. The road to all these splendid things, as

your father says, is through work. It wants an hour yet to dinner. I will give that hour to Euripides. No more waste of time for me, Nell.'

He nodded his head and ran into the house, eager not to lose a moment.

The girl looked after him admiringly and fondly. 'Oh!' she murmured; 'what a splendid thing to be a man and to become Archbishop, and Lord Chancellor, and Leader of the House! Oh! how clever he is, and how great he will become!'

'I've had a serious talk with Challice to-day,' said the private tutor to his wife in the evening.

'Will is *such* a nice boy,' said the wife. 'What a pity that he won't work!'

'He's got enough money to begin with, and he has never been to a public school. I have been firing his imagination, however, with the rich and varied prospect before a boy who really will work and has brains. He is a dreamer; he has vague ambitions; perhaps I may have succeeded in fixing them. But who knows? He is a dreamer. He plays the piano and listens to the music. Sometimes he makes verses. Who knows what such a lad may do?'

II

Two years later the same pair stood in the same place at the same season of the year. Term was over—the third term of the first year at Cambridge.

'I haven't pleased your father,' said the young man—he was slight and boyish-looking still, but on his face there was a new stamp—he had eaten of the

tree of knowledge. 'I have won no scholarships and taken no prizes. My grand ideas about University laurels are changed. You see, Nell, I have discovered that unless one goes into the Church a good degree helps nobody. And, of course, it ruins a man in other ways to put in all the time working for a degree.'

'You know,' said Nell, 'we don't think so here.'

'I know. Then you see I had to make the acquaintance of the men and to show them that I was a person of—of some importance. A man who can play and sing is always useful. We are an extremely social College, and the—the friction of mind with mind, you know—it is the best education possible for a man—I'm sure it is—much better than poring over Plato. Then I found so many things in which I was deficient. French fiction, for example; and I knew so very little about Art—oh! I have passed a most busy and useful time.'

He forgot to mention such little things as nap, *écarté*, loo, billiards, Paris, and London, as forming part of his education. Yet everybody will own that these are important elements in the forming of a man.

'I see,' said Nell.

'But your father won't. He is all for the Senate House. You do take a little interest in me still, Nell? Just a little interest—in an old friend?'

'Of course I do, Will.' She blushed and dropped her eyes. Their fingers touched, but only for a moment. The touching of fingers is very innocent. Perhaps it was accidental.

'Nell,' said the young man, with deep feeling and earnestness, 'whatever I do—to whatever height I rise, I shall always feel—' here he stopped because he

could hardly say that she had stimulated him or inspired him—‘always feel, Nell, that it began here—it began here.’ He looked about the garden. ‘On this spot I first resolved to become a great man. It was on the very day when your father told me that I might be great if I chose; of course, I knew so much before, but it pleased me; it stimulated me. I told you here, on this spot, and you approved and cheered me on. Well, I don’t, of course, tell any of the men about my ambitions. Mostly, I suppose, they have got their own. Some of them, I know, don’t soar above a country living—I laugh in my sleeve, Nell, when I listen to their confessions—a country living—a house and a garden and a church; that is a noble ambition, truly! I laugh, Nell, when I think of what I could tell them; the rapid upward climb; the dizzy height, the grasp of power and of authority!’

He spoke very grandly, and waved his hand and threw his head back and looked every inch a leader—one round whom the soldiers of a holy cause would rally. The girl’s eyes brightened and her cheek glowed, even though she remembered what at that moment she would rather have forgotten: the words of her father at breakfast. ‘Challice has done nothing,’ he said, ‘he has attempted nothing; now he will never do anything. It is just as I expected. A dreamer! A dreamer!’

‘It was here,’ Will continued, ‘that I resolved on greatness. It was on this spot that I imparted my ambition to you. Nell, on this spot I again impart to you my choice. I will become a great statesman. I have money to start me—most fellows have to spend the best part of their lives in getting money enough

to give them a start. I shall be the Leader of the House. Mind, to anyone but you this ambition would seem presumptuous. It is my secret which I trust with you, Nell.' He caught her hands, drew her gently, and kissed her on the forehead. 'Dear Nell,' he said, 'long before my ambition is realised, you will be by my side, encouraging, and advising, and consoling.'

He spoke as a young man should ; and tenderly, as a lover should ; but there was something not right—a secret thorn—something jarred. In the brave words—in the tender tones—there was a touch, a tone, a look, out of harmony. Will Challice could not tell his mistress that all day long there was a voice within him crying : 'Work, work ! Get up and work ! All this is folly ! Work ! Nothing can be done without work—work—work !'

III

It was about the beginning of the Michaelmas term that the very remarkable occurrences, or series of occurrences, began which are the cause and origin of this history. Many men have failed and many have succeeded. Will Challice is, perhaps, the only man who has ever done both, and in the same line and at the same time. The thing came upon him quite suddenly and unexpectedly. It was at two in the morning ; he had spent the evening quietly in the society of three other men and two packs of cards. His own rooms, he observed as he crossed the court, were lit up—he wondered how his 'gyp' could have been so careless. He opened his door and entered

his room. Heavens! At the table, on which the lamp was burning, sat before a pile of books—himself! Challice rubbed his eyes; he was not frightened; there is nothing to alarm a man in the sight of himself, though sometimes a good deal to disgust; but if you saw, in a looking-glass, your own face and figure doing *something else*, you would be astonished: you might even be alarmed. Challice had heard of men seeing rats, circles, triangles, even—he thought of his misspent evenings which were by no means innocent of whisky and potash: he concluded that this must be an appearance, to be referred, like the rats and circles, to strong drink. He thought that it would vanish as he gazed.

It did not; on the contrary, it became, if anything, clearer. There was a reading lamp on the table which threw a strong circle of light upon the bent head of the reader. Then Will Challice began to tremble and his knees gave way. The clock ticked on the mantelshelf: else there was no sound: the College was wrapped and lapped in the silence of sleep.

He nerved himself: he stepped forwards. ‘Speak!’ he cried, and the sound of his own voice terrified him. Whoever heard of a man questioning himself in the dead of night? ‘Speak!—What does this mean?’

Then the reader lifted his head, placed a book-mark to keep his place, and turned slowly in his chair—one of those wooden chairs the seat of which turns round. Yes—it was himself—his own face that met the face of the returned reveller. But there was no terror in that face—a serious resolve, rather—a set purpose—grave eyes. He, the reader, leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs.

‘Yes,’ he said, and the voice again startled the other man. ‘You have a right—a complete right—to an explanation. I have felt for a long time that something would have to be done; I’ve been going on in a most uncomfortable manner. In spite of my continual remonstrances, I *could* not persuade you to work. You must have recognised that you contained two men: the one indolent, dreamy, always carried away by the pleasures or caprice of the moment—a feather-brain. The other: ambitious, clearheaded, and eager for work. Your part would give my part no chance. Very well; we are partly separated. That is all. Partly separated.’

The dreamer sat down and stared. ‘I don’t understand,’ he said.

‘No more time will be lost,’ the worker went on. ‘I have begun to work. For some time past I have been working at night—I am not going to stand it any longer.’

‘That’s what made me so heavy in the morning, then?’

‘That was the cause. Now, however, I am going to work in earnest, and all day long.’

‘I don’t care if it’s real; but this is a dream. I don’t care so long as I needn’t work with you. But, I say, what will the men say? I can’t pretend to have a twin, all of a sudden.’

‘N—no. Besides, there are other difficulties. We belong to each other, you see. We must share these rooms. Listen, I have quite thought it out. At night we shall be one; at breakfast and in the Hall we will be one; you shall give me the entire use of these rooms all day and all the evening for work.

In examinations of course you will remain here locked in, while I go to the Senate House. You will go to chapel for both.'

'N—no. Chapel must belong to you.'

'I say you will go to chapel for both.' This with resolution.

'Oh!' the other half gave way. 'But what am I to do all day?'

'I'm sure I don't know. Do what you like. If you like to stay here you can. You may play or sing. You may read your French novels; you will not disturb me. But if you bring any of your friends here it will be awkward, because they will perceive that you are double. Now we will go to bed. It is half-past two.'

IV

IN the morning Will awoke with a strange sense of something. This feeling of something is not uncommon with gentlemen who go to bed about three. He got up and dressed. A cup of tea made him remember but imperfectly what had happened. 'I must have had too much whisky,' he murmured. 'I saw myself—actually myself—hard at work.' Here his eyes fell upon the table. There were the books—books on Political Economy—with a note-book and every indication of work. More; he knew, he remembered, the contents of these books. He sat down bewildered. Then it seemed as if there was a struggle within him as of two who strove for mastery. 'Work!' cried one. 'I won't,' said the other. 'You shall.' 'I won't.' A most ignoble quarrel, yet it pulled him this way and that towards the table or

back in the long easy chair. Finally the struggle ended: he fell back; he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, the room was cleared of the breakfast things, and he saw himself sitting at the table hard at work.

‘Good gracious!’ he cried, springing to his feet. ‘Is what I remember of last night real? Not a dream!’

‘Not a dream at all. I will no longer have my career blasted at the outset by your confounded laziness. I think you understand me perfectly. I am clear of you whenever I please. I join you when I please.’

‘Oh! And have I the same power?’

‘You? Certainly not. You are only the Half that won’t work. You have got no power at all.’

‘Oh! Well—I shall not stand that.’

‘You can’t help yourself. I am the Intellectual Principle; mine is the Will: mine is the clear head and the authority.’

‘What am I then?’

‘You? I don’t know. You are me—yourself—without the Intellectual Principle. That is what you are. I must define you by negatives. You cannot argue, or reason, or create, or invent: you remember like an animal from assistance: you behave nicely because you have been trained: you are—in short—you are the Animal Part.’

‘Oh!’ He was angry: he did not know what to reply: he was humiliated.

‘Don’t fall into a rage. Go away and amuse yourself. You can do anything you please. Come back, however, in time for Hall.’

The Animal Part obeyed. He went out leaving the other Part over his books. He spent the morning with other men as industriously disposed as himself. He found a strange lightness of spirits. There was no remonstrating voice within him reproaching him for his laziness, urging him to get up and go to work. Not at all; that voice was silent; he was left quite undisturbed. He talked with these men over tobacco; he played billiards with them; he lay in a chair and looked at a novel. He had luncheon and beer, and more tobacco. He went down the river in the College boat; he had an hour or two of whist before Hall. Then he returned to his room.

His other Half looked up, surprised.

‘Already? The day has flown.’

‘One moment,’ said Will, ‘before we go in. You’re a serious sort, you know, and I’m one of the—the lighter ornaments of the College, and I sit among them. It would be awkward breaking off all at once. Besides——’

‘I understand. Continue to sit with them for awhile, and talk as much idiotic stuff as you please. Presently you will find that a change of companions and of conversation has become necessary.’

Nobody noticed any change; the two in one sat at table and ate like one; they talked like one; they talked frivolously, telling stories like one. After Hall they went back to their chambers.

‘You can leave me,’ said the student. ‘I shall rest for an hour or so. Then I shall go on again.’

This very remarkable arrangement went on undisturbed for some time. No one suspected it. No one discovered it. It became quite natural for

Challice to go out of his room in the morning and to leave himself at work ; it became natural to go down to Hall at seven with a mingled recollection of work and amusements. The reproaching voice was silent, the Animal Part was left at peace, and the Intellectual Part went on reading at peace.

One evening, however, going across the court at midnight, Will met the tutor.

‘ Challice,’ he said, ‘ is it wise to burn the candle at both ends ? Come—you told me this morning that you were working hard. What do you call this ? You cannot serve two masters.’

‘ It is quite true,’ said the Reading Half on being questioned. ‘ I have foreseen this difficulty for some time. I called on the tutor this morning, and I told him of my intention to work. He laughed aloud. I insisted. Then he pointed out the absurdity of pretending to work while one was idling about all day. This is awkward.’

‘ What do you propose then ? ’

‘ I propose that you stay indoors all the morning until two o’clock, locked in.’

‘ What ? And look on while you are mugging ? ’

‘ Exactly. You may read French novels : you may go to sleep. You must be quiet. Only, you must be here—all the morning. In the afternoon you may do what you please. I may quite trust you to avoid any effort of the brain. Oh ! And you will avoid anything stronger than tea before Hall. No more beer for lunch. It makes me heavy.’

‘ No more beer ? But this is tyranny.’

‘ No. It is ambition. In the evening you may go out and play cards. I shall stay here.’

They went to bed. It seemed to Will as if the other Part of him—the Intellectual Part—ordered him to go to sleep without further thought.

This curious life of separation and of partial union continued, in fact, for the whole of the undergraduate time. Gradually, however, a great change came over the lazy Half--the Animal Half. It—he—perceived that the whole of his reasoning powers had become absorbed by the Intellectual Half. He became really incapable of reasoning. He could not follow out a thought; he had no thoughts. This made him seem dull, because even the most indolent person likes to think that he has some powers of argument. This moiety of Challice had none. He became quite dull; his old wit deserted him; he was heavy; he drifted gradually out of the society which he had formerly frequented; he perceived that his old friends not only found him dull, but regarded him as a traitor. He had become, they believed, that contemptible person, the man who reads. He was no longer a dweller in the Castle of Indolence; he had gone over to the other side.

Life became very dull indeed to this Half. He got into the habit of lying on a sofa, watching the other Half who sat at the table tearing the heart out of books. He admired the energy of that Half; for himself, he could do nothing; if he read at all it was a novel of the lowest kind; he even bought the penny novelette and read that with interest; if he came to a passage which contained a thought or a reflection he passed it over. He had ceased to think; he no longer even troubled himself about losing the power of thought.

Another thing came upon him ; not suddenly, but gradually, so that he was not alarmed at it. He began to care no longer about the games of which he had formerly been so fond. Billiards, racquets, cards, all require, you see, a certain amount of reasoning, of quick intelligence and rapid action. This unfortunate young man had no rapidity of intelligence left. He was too stupid to play games. He became too stupid even to row.

He ceased to be a dreamer ; all his dreams were gone ; he ceased to make music at the piano ; he ceased to sing ; he could neither play nor sing : these things gave him no pleasure. He ceased, in short, to take interest in anything, cared for nothing, and hoped for nothing.

In Hall the two in one sat now with the reading set. Their talk was all of books and 'subjects,' and so forth. The Intellectual Half held his own with the rest : nay, he became a person to be considered. It was remarked, however, that any who met Challice out walking found him stupid and dull beyond relief. This was put down to preoccupation. The man was full of his work ; he was meditating, they said ; his brain was working all the while ; he was making up for lost time.

In the evening the lazy Half sat in an easy chair and took tobacco, while the other Half worked. At eleven the Industrious Half disappeared. Then the Whole went to bed.

They seldom spoke except when Industry had some more orders to give. It was no longer advice, or suggestion, or a wish, or a prayer : it was an order. Indolence was a servant. 'You took more

wine than is good for me at dinner to-day,' said Industry. 'Restrict yourself to a pint of claret, and that of the lightest for the future.' Or, 'You are not taking exercise enough. If you have no longer brain power enough even for the sliding seat, walk—walk fast—go out to the top of the Gogs and back again. I want all my energies.' Once Indolence caught a cold: it was a month before the May examinations. The wrath and reproaches of Industry, compelled to give up a whole day to nursing that cold, were very hard to bear. Yet Indolence could not resist; he could not even remonstrate; he was now a mere slave.

When the examinations came it was necessary to observe precautions of a severer kind. To begin with, Indolence had to get up at six and go for an hour's run, for the better bracing of the nerves; he had to stay hidden indoors all day, while his ambitious twin sat in the Hall, flooring papers. He had to give up tobacco in order to keep the other Half's head clear. 'Courage,' said Intellect, 'a day or two more and you shall plunge again into the sensuality of your pipe and your beer. Heavens! When I look at you, and think of what I was becoming!'

Industry got a scholarship; Intellect got a University medal; Ambition received the congratulations of the tutor.

'How long,' asked the Animal, 'is this kind of thing going to continue?'

'How long? Do you suppose,' replied the other Half, 'that I have given up my ambition? Remember what you said two years ago. You were younger then. You would sweep the board; you

would row in the University boat; you would play in the Eleven; you would be a Leader—in all, all! You would then take up with something—you knew not what—and you would step to the front. You remember?’

‘A dream—a dream. I was younger then.’

‘No longer a dream. It is a settled purpose. Hear me. I am going to be a statesman. I shall play the highest game of all. I shall go into the House. I shall rise—slowly at first, but steadily.’

‘And I?’

‘You are a log tied to my heel, but you shall be an obedient log. If you were not——’

Indolence shivered and crouched. ‘Am I then—all my life—to be your servant?’

‘Your life? No—my life.’ The two glared at each other. ‘Silence! Log. Let me work.’

‘I shall not be silent,’ cried Indolence, roused to momentary self-assertion. ‘I have no enjoyment left in life. You have taken all—all——’

‘You have left what you loved best of all—your sloth. Lie down—and take your rest. Why, you do nothing all day. A stalled ox is not more lazy. You eat and drink and take exercise and sleep. What more, for such as you, has life to give? You are now an animal. My half has absorbed all the intellectual part of you. Lie down, I say—lie down, and let me work.’

The Animal could not lie down. He was restless. He walked about the room. He was discontented. He was jealous. The other Half, he saw plainly, was getting the better share of things. That Half was admired and envied. By accident, as he paced the

room, he looked in the glass; and he started, for his face had grown heavy: there was a bovine look about the cheeks: the eyes were dull: the mouth full. Then the other Half rose and stood beside him. Together they looked at their own faces. 'Ha!' cried Ambition, well satisfied at the contrast. 'It works already. Mine is the face intended for me: yours is the face into which this degenerate mould might sink. Mine contains the soul; yours—the animal. You have got what you wanted, Sloth. Your dreams are gone from you. I have got them, though, and I am turning them into action. As time goes on, your face will become more bovine, your eyes duller. What will be the end?' His brow darkened. 'I don't know. We are like the Siamese twins.'

'One of them took to drink,' murmured the inferior Half. 'What if I were to follow his example?'

'You will not. You do not dare!' But his blanched face showed his terror at the very thought.

V

THE first step was achieved. The first class was gained. Challice of Pembroke was second classic; he might have been senior but for the unaccountable laziness of his first year. He was University scholar, medallist, prizeman; he was one of the best speakers at the Union. He was known to be ambitious. He was not popular, however, because he was liable to strange fits of dulness; those who met him wandering about the banks of the river found him apparently

unable to understand things ; at such times he looked heavy and dull ; it was supposed that he was abstracted ; men respected his moods, but these things do not increase friendships. Challice the Animal and Challice the Intellect weighed each other down.

They left Cambridge ; they went to London ; they took lodgings. ‘ You are now so different from me in appearance,’ said the Intellect, ‘ that I think we may leave off the usual precautions. Go about without troubling what I am and what I am doing. Go about and amuse yourself, but be careful.’

The victim of sloth obeyed ; he went about all day long in heavy, meaningless fashion ; he looked at things in shops ; he sat in museums and dropped off to sleep. He strolled round squares. At luncheon and dinner time he found out restaurants where he could feed—in reality, the only pleasure left to him was to eat, drink, and sleep.

One day he was in Kensington Gardens, sitting half asleep in the sun. People walked up and down the walk before him ; beautiful women gaily dressed ; sprightly women gaily talking ; the world of wealth, fashion, extravagance, and youth. He was no more than three-and-twenty himself. He ought to have been fired by the sight of all this beauty, and all this happiness. Nobody in the world can look half so happy as a lovely girl finely dressed. But he sat there like a clod, dull and insensate.

Presently, a voice which he remembered : ‘ Papa, it is Will Challice !’ He looked up heavily. ‘ Why Will’—the girl stood before him—‘ don’t you know me ?’

It was Nell, the daughter of his tutor, now a comely maiden of one-and-twenty, who laughed and held out her hand to him. He rose, but not with alacrity. The shadow of a smile crossed his face. He took her hand.

‘Challice!’ his tutor clapped him on the shoulder. ‘I haven’t seen you since you took your degree. Splendid, my boy! But it might have been just one place better. I hear you are reading Law—good. With the House before you? Good again! Let me look at you. Humph!’ He grunted a little disappointment. ‘You don’t look quite so—quite so—what? Do you take exercise enough?’

‘Plenty of exercise—plenty,’ replied the young scholar, who looked so curiously dull and heavy.

‘Well, let us walk together. You are doing nothing for the moment.’

They walked together; Nelly between them.

‘Father,’ she said, when they arrived at their lodgings in Albemarle Street, ‘what has come over that poor man? He has gone stupid with his success. I could not get a word out of him. He kept staring at me without speaking.’

Was he a lumpish log, or was he a man all nerves and electricity?

In the morning Will Challice partly solved the question, because he called and showed clearly that he was an insensible log, and a lumpish log. He sat for an hour gazing at the girl as if he would devour her, but he said nothing.

In the evening Cousin Tom called, bringing Will Challice again—but how changed! Was such a change really due to evening dress? Keen of feature,

bright of eye, full of animation. 'Why, Will,' said Nelly, 'what is the matter with you sometimes? When you were here this morning, one could not get a word out of you. Your very face looked heavy.'

He changed colour. 'I have times when I—I—lose myself—thinking—thinking of things, you know.'

They passed a delightful evening. But when Will went away the girl became meditative. For, although he had talked without stopping on every kind of subject, there was no hungry look in his eye, such as she had perceived with natural satisfaction in the morning. Every maiden likes that look of hunger, the outward sign and indication of respect to her charms.

They were up in town for a month. Every morning Will called and sat glum but hungry-eyed, gazing on the girl and saying nothing. Every evening he called again and talked scholarship and politics with her father, his face changed, his whole manner different, and without any look of hunger in his eyes.

One day after a fortnight or so of this, Will the Animal stood up after breakfast and spoke.

'There has got to be a change.'

'You are changing, in fact,' replied the other with a sneer.

'I am in love. I am going to marry a girl. Now hold your tongue,' for the Intellectual Half bounded in his chair. 'You have left me very little power of speech. Let me try to explain what I—I want to say.' He spoke painfully and slowly. 'Let me—try—I have lost, bit by bit, almost everything. I don't want to read—I can't play any more. I don't care about

anything much. But this girl I do care about. I have always loved her, and you—you with your deuced intellect—cannot kill that part of me. Be quiet—let me try to think. She loves me, too. She loves me for myself, and not on account of you and your success. She is sorry for me. She has given me—I don't know how—the power of thinking a little. When I am married to her, she will give me more. Let us part absolutely. Take all my intellect and go. Nell will marry a stupid man, but he will get something from her—something I am sure. I feel different already; I said something to-day which made her laugh. What are you glaring at me for ?'

'I am not glaring. I am thinking. Go on.'

'This has got to stop. Now find some way of stopping it, or—or——'

'What can you do ?'

'I can drink,' he said, with awful meaning. 'I can ruin you. And I will, unless you agree to part.'

The Intellectual Half was looking at him with a strangely softened face. There was neither scorn nor hatred in that face. 'Dimidium Animæ,' he said, 'Half of my Soul, I have something to say as well. Confess, however, first of all, that I was right. Had it not been for this step—the most severe measure possible, I admit—nothing would have been achieved. Eh ?'

'Perhaps. You *would* work, you see.'

'Yes. Well—I have made a discovery. It is that I have been too thorough. I don't quite understand how, logically and naturally, anything else was possible. I wanted, Heaven knows, all the intellect there was; you were, therefore, bound to become the Animal, pure

and simple. Well, you see, we are not really two, but one. Can't we hit upon an agreement?'

'What agreement?'

'Some agreement—some *modus vivendi*. I shall get, it is true, some of the Animal; you will get some of the Intellectual, but we shall be united again, and after all——' He looked very kindly upon himself and held out his hand. So they stood with clasped hands looking at each other.

'I found it out through Nell,' the Intellectual Half went on. 'You went to see her every morning—I went every evening. You were always brimful of love for her; I, who knew this, was not moved in the slightest degree by her. Oh! I know that she is the best girl that the world, at this moment, has to show; I am fully persuaded of that: yet she has ceased to move me. I think of her Intellect, which is certainly much lower than my own, and I cannot even admire her. In other words, I cannot be moved by any woman. This terrifies me.'

'Why?'

'It threatens my future. Don't you see? He who cannot be moved by woman is no longer man. But man can only be moved by brother man. If I cannot move men my career is at an end. What they call magnetism belongs to the animal within us. When that is gone, I now perceive, when the animal is killed, the rest of the man has no longer any charm, any attraction, any persuasion, any power of leading, teaching, compelling, or guiding. His success, whatever he does, is all glitter—evanescent glitter. He may sit down and hold his tongue, for he can do no more good.'

'I only half understand.'

‘Intellect, in short, my lower Half, is of no use without human passion. That is what it means. We have gone too far. Let us end it.’

‘How? You despise the man who is only animal.’

‘No—no! The animal is part of man. I understand now. I have done wrong—brother Half—to separate myself so much from you. Only, you carried it too far. You *would* not work: you would not give me even a decent show. Suppose—I say suppose—we were united once more. Could I count on being allowed to work?’

‘Yes,’ said the Animal, ‘I have had a lesson too. You shall work,’ he hesitated and shuddered, ‘in reason, of course—say all the morning, and, if you go into the House, all the evening.’

‘I would not be hard upon you. I would let you have a reasonable amount of indolence and rest. My success will be less rapid, on your account, but it will be more solid. Do you think that, if we were to be lost again in each other, I should once more feel for that girl as——’

‘Why,’ said the Animal, ‘you would be—Me; and what I feel for her is, I assure you, overwhelming.’

That evening Will Challice sat at the open window in the dark, Nellie’s hand in his. ‘My dear,’ he murmured, ‘tell me, do you love me more because I have realised some of our old dreams?’

‘Will; how can I tell you? I love you, not your success. If you had not done so well, it would have made no difference. Your success is only an accidental part of you.’ Oh! the metaphysician! ‘You are not your success. Yet, of course, I don’t love you for

your fine degree, you conceited boy, and yet it is for yourself.'

He kissed her forehead. 'The old dream time was pleasant, wasn't it? when we chose to be Archbishop of Canterbury one day and Lord Chancellor the next. To be Leader of the House of Commons is the present ambition. It is a most splendid thing'—the dreamer's eyes looked up into space with the old light in them—'a most splendid thing—to lead the House—to sway the House. But I don't know,' he sighed, 'it will take an awful lot of work. And the Cambridge business did take it out of one most tremendously. I didn't believe, Nell, that I had such an amount of work in me.'

'You have been so gloomy lately, Will. Was that fatigue?'

'Ambition on the brain, Nell,' he replied, lightly—as lightly as of old—success had not destroyed the old gaiety of heart. 'I've consulted a learned physician, Dr. Sydenham Celsus Galen, Wimpole Street. He says that an engagement with the right girl—he is extremely particular on that point, so that I do hope, Nell, we have made no mistake—is a sovereign remedy for all mopey, glum dumpsy, moody, broody, gloomy, sulky, ill-conditioned vapours. It is, he confessed, the only medicine in his pharmacopœia. All his clients have to follow that prescription. You will very soon find that those glum dumpsy moods have vanished quite away. You will charm them away. Oh! I live again—I breathe—I think—I don't work so infernally hard. I am once more human—because I love, and because——' The girl's head rested upon his arm, and he kissed her forehead.

A NIGHT WITH TANTALUS

A COLONIAL REMINISCENCE

It was past ten o'clock when the ponies left the hard, white road and turned into the dark avenue of palms which formed the approach to the little country box where the two men lived. The night was hot and dry; there was a gentle breeze, but it was the hot wind which lifted the white dust and floated it—all of it, as it seemed—exactly on the level of the riders' breathing apparatus, so as to parch the tongue and dry up the throat.

They were two railway engineers, and they were getting home after a long and fatiguing journey. They had been up and on the line before six in the morning; they had spent the great heat of the day drawing plans in a stifling hot office; they were afield again when the sun got low; they had taken a hasty dinner with the chief, and they were now home again. The monotony of the day, needless to explain, had been varied by many draughts of mingled soda and whisky.

As they turned into the avenue, one broke the silence, and said briefly, 'Whisky and soda, Jack?'

The other replied, 'Two, my boy. It's a thirsty country, but, thank Heaven! there's lashin's to drink.'

The tumbledown shanty where they lived had been put up for a hunting-box. It contained one room,

roughly furnished with a table, a couple of chairs, a couple of small iron bedsteads, a sideboard, and a safety bin. The box was built of half a dozen uprights, rudely hewn out of trees, and its walls were of thin wood taken from packing-cases. It had a small lean-to by way of verandah. Outside, there was a stable for four horses, a servant's cottage, and a kitchen. Nothing more. Behind it lay a narrow valley running up to the mountains, thick with forest; in front, separated by the avenue of palms, was the long white road; there was no house within five miles. The two men lived here because it was convenient to their section of the line.

They threw themselves off their ponies.

‘Arakhan!’ shouted one of them.

Now, Arakhan was their groom, cook, and general servant. Nobody else would have Arakhan because he was a convicted burglar, a suspected murderer, and a terrible, black-avised rogue to look at.

‘Arakhan!’ No reply. ‘Arakhan, where the devil are you?’ No reply.

‘Gone a-burgling, I suppose. Got a crib to crack, with a murder. Let’s put the ponies in the stable. Hang it! I’m too thirsty to look after them. We’ll go and get a drink. Then we’ll come back. They won’t hurt.’

They opened the stable door, led the ponies into their boxes and went out, putting up the bar.

The house door was standing open—it always was open day and night—but there was nothing for anyone to steal except the bottles, and they were in the safety bin.

‘Phew!’ They threw off their hats. ‘What a night it is! Let’s get some drink, for Heaven’s sake!’

The speaker drew out a silver box, and struck a light. The match flared up for a moment, and then went out. He struck another. This behaved in the same disappointing manner. 'Nasty, cheap, weedy things they are,' growled the engineer. He lit a third. 'Now then,' he said, 'where's the lamp?' It ought to have been on the table, but it wasn't.

'There it is, on the sideboard—quick!'

Too late. The third match went out while the lamp was borne from the sideboard to the table.

'Never mind. Here's another.'

He lit the fourth match. This burned well and steadily. He lifted the glass of the lamp and ignited the wick. 'There!' he said. 'Now for the padlock. Oh! give me a soda, quick. I pant—I die.'

There stood by the sideboard, screwed into the up-rights of the house, a small and very useful article of furniture known as a safety bin. The beauty of this kind of bin is that nobody can take anything out of it unless he have the secret of the letter padlock which guards the contents. You can see the bottles, but you cannot get them out.

The other man was by this time on his knees before the safety bin. Not praying to the bottles, but using the attitude most convenient to get at the padlock, which was about two feet from the ground, and at his side.

'Hold the lamp, Jack,' he said, 'I can't see the letters.'

Jack took up the lamp. Just then the wick suddenly flared up and went out, leaving a fragrance of oil, but no light.

'What's the matter with the thing?' asked Jack.

‘No oil, I believe. The burglar has forgotten the oil.’

‘Well, we must make a match do. Strike another. I’m like a lime kiln.’

Jack struck another match.

‘Now, then, make haste.’

‘All right. DROP. That’s the word. Here’s the D. Here’s the R. Confound it!’ For the match at this point went out.

‘I’ve lost the letters again. Strike another, Jack. Haven’t we got a candle somewhere? Or a bit of paper? Now then——’

It was pitch dark, otherwise he might have seen his friend turn pale and stagger.

‘Make haste, Jack.’

‘I haven’t got any more matches. Give me your box.’

The other man rose from his knees and began, carelessly and confidently at first, to search his waistcoat pockets. No matchbox there. He then felt in his trousers pockets. None there. Then he became a little alarmed, and, in some precipitation, began to feel his coat pockets, of which there were many. No matchbox anywhere. He then dragged everything out. Keys, purse, pocket-book, handkerchief, knife, pencil, foot-rule, pocket-tape, note-book, letters—everything—throwing all on the floor.

‘Jack,’ he said solemnly, after a long search, ‘are you quite—quite—sure that you’ve got no matches?’

‘Quite.’

‘No more have I. Let’s call Arakhan. Perhaps he has come back.’

They went out into the verandah and shouted for

their retainer. There was no reply ; the stars winked at them ; they heard their voices echoing from side to side of the narrow valley, growing fainter and fainter.

‘He must have another burglary on,’ said Jack. ‘The beast is never content.’

They returned to the room.

‘Hang it,’ said the other, ‘there must be matches somewhere. It’s impossible that we should be left without matches. Let’s hunt about. You take the table, I’ll search the sideboard.’

Nothing at all was on the table, except the lamp, which the searcher upset and smashed. The sideboard was covered with a miscellaneous collection of plates and glasses. It was difficult to find anything in such a collection. At the edge stood a large red earthenware jug filled with water. He who looked for matches found the jug, but, unfortunately, found it on the wrong side, so that he toppled it over, and it was broken.

‘Well?’

‘There are no matches. Try to find the letters by feeling.’

‘I wish I hadn’t broken the jug. Even a drink of water would have been something.’

‘Well—let us try again.’

He found the padlock, and began to feel with his fingers.

‘D is a good fat letter,’ he said. ‘D. Here’s D, I think. Unless it’s B. R is—is—I think I’ve found R. Yes. I’m sure this is R. And here’s O—round fat O. Where’s P?’ He continued to feel, murmuring hopefully. Here’s P, I believe. Here’s P, I’m sure—now then. Hang the thing! The other letters have slewed round.’

Everybody knows that with a letter padlock it is necessary to keep the letters in line.

‘Try again,’ said the other man, gasping.

He did try. He tried for half an hour ; he tried with patience and nearly succeeded ; then with impatience and never came near success ; while he captured one letter the others slipped round ; if he thought he had all, there was one wrong. At last he stood up and wiped his brow in despair.

‘Jack,’ he said, ‘I should like to curse the thing, but it’s no use.’

‘No use,’ the other echoed ; ‘I’ve been thinking the same thing for the last half hour. For such an occasion as this——’

‘Look here, Jack. I believe there’s a crowbar or a pick in the stable. Let us find it, and prize the thing open.’

They went out together, and opened the stable door. The ponies occupied two of the boxes. They searched them first. No crowbar there. They then searched the other two, kicking about the litter, and feeling the corners. But no crowbar. Meantime, the ponies, finding the door open and no opposition to their going out, did walk out together, and trotted off down the avenue.

‘Jack ! The ponies are gone.’

They ran out together, calling to the sagacious creatures, who only turned their trot into a run, and, in half a minute, were out in the road and galloping away in the darkness.

‘Good Lord ! The devil’s abroad to-night, I believe.’

‘They’re gone,’ said Jack. ‘They’ll go off into the

forest, and they'll be picked up by a maroon, and mine was a new saddle. There goes fifty pounds, old man. Because, as for our getting ponies or saddles again——'

'I can't swear, I can't say anything. I *am* so thirsty.'

They crept back to the house, hopeless and crushed. The night was darker than ever: darker and closer, and hotter and stiller. And not a drop of anything to drink—not even cold water. They found themselves once more side by side in front of the safety bin.

'I can feel a bottle,' said Jack, with a broken voice. 'It's full of whisky, and the soda bottles are under it.'

'I've got a corkscrew in my pocket,' said the other.

'Who would ever dream of having a corkscrew and no bottle to put it in?'

'The bottle is deliciously cool to touch,' said Jack. 'It's the only thing that is cool. Can't we cut down the infernal house in order to get it?'

'Look here; tie a handkerchief round your hand, so as to get a good purchase. So. Now, then! foot to foot, hand by hand. Ready? Pull!'

They pulled. They had the strength of ten, because they were so thirsty; the iron bent, but it did not give way, and the padlock held. 'Pull again—now.' They pulled like Samson, and with much the same result. Craunch! Craunch! Crush! Crush!

They were lying on the floor under a wreck. The uprights of the house had given way with everything—safety bin, sideboard, and the two thirsty men—and all lay on the floor together in mingled wreck.

'Jack! I believe my left thumb's cut off. Are you dead?'

‘Very nearly,’ Jack replied faintly. ‘There was oil in the broken lamp, and my head’s in it.’

‘Get up and look for the whisky and the soda. They’re somewhere about.’

They were. The liquid was on the floor. The bottles were in fragments. It was all over. There was nothing more to be hoped. The worst had happened. Their hands were cut by the broken glass; the side of the house was pulled down; their table and sideboard wrecked; their lamp and their water jug broken; and their ponies gone. The job was complete. They threw themselves upon their beds and lay there in sleepless silence.

At five in the morning Arakhan appeared. It was beginning to get light, and the wreck was visible. He stood in the door and gazed. Everything broken, and the side of the house gone, and his two masters lying pale and livid on their beds, but not asleep.

‘Where the devil were you last night?’ asked one of the men, from his bed.

‘Sahib give leave. Go to port. Yesterday more whisky come—plenty soda come.’

‘What?’ It was now rapidly getting lighter. The thirsty man sprang to his feet. ‘Where are they?’ Arakhan pointed to the corner of the room. There was the case of whisky, open. Beside it were soda water bottles—rows of soda water bottles—dozens of soda water bottles.

‘And they were here all the time! At our very hands—within reach, and we didn’t know it, Jack!’

Gurgle—gurgle—gurgle. It was the opening of the soda. What other reply did he expect?

*THE SOLID GOLD REEF
COMPANY LIMITED*

ACT I

‘You dear old boy,’ said the girl, ‘I am sure I wish it could be—with all my heart—if I have any heart.’

‘I don’t believe you have,’ replied the boy, gloomily.

‘Well, but Reg, consider ; you’ve got no money.’

‘I’ve got five thousand pounds. If a man can’t make his way upon that, he must be a poor stick.’

‘You would go abroad with it and dig, and take your wife with you—to wash and cook.’

‘We would do something with the money here. You should stay in London, Rosie.’

‘Yes. In a suburban villa, at Shepherd’s Bush, perhaps. No, Reg, when I marry, if ever I do—I am in no hurry—I will step out of this room into one exactly like it.’ The room was a splendid drawing-room in Palace Gardens, splendidly furnished. ‘I shall have my footmen and my carriage, and I shall——’

‘Rosie, give me the right to earn all these things for you !’ the young man cried impetuously.

‘You can only earn them for me by the time you have one foot in the grave. Hadn’t I better in the

meantime marry some old gentleman with his one foot in the grave, so as to be ready for you against the time when you come home? In two or three years the other foot I dare say would slide into the grave as well.'

'You laugh at my trouble. You feel nothing.'

'If the pater would part—but he won't—he says he wants all his money for himself, and that I've got to marry well. Besides, Reg'—here her face clouded and she lowered her voice—'there are times when he looks anxious. We didn't always live in Palace Gardens. Suppose we should lose it all as quickly as we got it. Oh!' she shivered and trembled. 'No, I will never, never marry a poor man. Get rich, my dear boy, and you may aspire even to the valuable possession of this heartless hand.'

She held it out. He took it, pressed it, stooped and kissed her. Then he dropped her hand and walked quickly out of the room.

'Poor Reggie!' she murmured. 'I wish—I wish—but what is the use of wishing?'

ACT II

Two men—one young, the other about fifty—sat in the verandah of a small bungalow. It was after breakfast. They lay back in long bamboo chairs, each with a cigar. It looked as if they were resting. In reality they were talking business, and that very seriously

'Yes, sir,' said the elder man, with something of an American accent, 'I have somehow taken a fancy to this place. The situation is healthy.'

‘Well, I don’t know; I’ve had more than one touch of fever here.’

‘The climate is lovely——’

‘Except in the rains.’

‘The soil is fertile——’

‘I’ve dropped five thousand in it, and they haven’t come up again yet.’

‘They will. I have been round the estate, and I see money in it. Well, sir, here’s my offer: five thousand down, hard cash, as soon as the papers are signed.’

Reginald sat up. He was on the point of accepting the proposal, when a pony rode up to the house, and the rider, a native groom, jumped off, and gave him a note. He opened it and read. It was from his nearest neighbour, two or three miles away: ‘Don’t sell that man your estate. Gold has been found. The whole country is full of gold. Hold on. He’s an assayer. If he offers to buy, be quite sure that he has found gold on your land.—F. G.’

He put the note into his pocket, gave a verbal message to the boy, and turned to his guest, without betraying the least astonishment or emotion.

‘I beg your pardon. The note was from Bellamy, my next neighbour. Well? You were saying——’

‘Only that I have taken a fancy—perhaps a foolish fancy—to this place of yours, and I’ll give you, if you like, all that you have spent upon it.’

‘Well,’ he replied, reflectively, but with a little twinkle in his eye, ‘that seems handsome. But the place isn’t really worth the half that I have spent upon it. Anybody would tell you that. Come, let us be honest, whatever we are. I’ll tell you a better way. We will put the matter into the hands of Bellamy.’

He knows what a coffee plantation is worth. He shall name a price, and if we can agree upon that, we will make a deal of it.'

The other man changed colour. He wanted to settle the thing at once as between gentlemen. What need of third parties? But Reginald stood firm, and he presently rode away, quite sure that in a day or two this planter, too, would have heard the news.

A month later, the young coffee-planter stood on the deck of a steamer homeward bound. In his pocket-book was a plan of his auriferous estate; in a bag hanging round his neck was a small collection of yellow nuggets; in his boxes was a chosen assortment of quartz.

ACT III

'WELL, sir,' said the financier, 'you've brought this thing to me. You want my advice. Well, my advice is, don't fool away the only good thing that will ever happen to you. Luck such as this doesn't come more than once in a lifetime.'

'I have been offered ten thousand pounds for my estate.'

'Oh! Have you! Ten thousand? That was very liberal—very liberal indeed. Ten thousand for a gold reef!'

'But I thought as an old friend of my father you would, perhaps——'

'Young man, don't fool it away. He's waiting for you, I suppose, round the corner, with a bottle of fizz ready to close.'

'He is.'

'Well, go and drink his champagne. Always get

whatever you can. And then tell him that you'll see him——'

'I certainly will, sir, if you advise it. And then?'

'And then—leave it to me. And, young man, I think I heard, a year or two ago, something about you and my girl Rosie.'

'There was something, sir. Not enough to trouble you about it.'

'She told me. Rosie tells me all her love affairs.'

'Is she—is she unmarried?'

'Oh yes, and for the moment I believe she is free. She has had one or two engagements, but, somehow, they have come to nothing. There was the French Count, but that was knocked on the head very early in consequence of things discovered. And there was the Boom in Guano, but he fortunately smashed, much to Rosie's joy, because she never liked him. The last was Lord Evergreen. He was a nice old chap when you could understand what he said, and Rosie would have liked the title very much, though his grandchildren opposed the thing. Well, sir, I suppose you couldn't understand the trouble we took to keep that old man alive for his own wedding. Science did all it could, but 'twas of no use——' The financier sighed. 'The ways of Providence are inscrutable. He died, sir, the day before.'

'That was very sad.'

'A dashing of the cup from the lip, sir. My daughter would have been a Countess. Well, young gentleman, about this estate of yours. I think I see a way—I think, I am not yet sure—that I do see a way. Go now. See this liberal gentleman, and drink his champagne. And come here in a week. Then, if

I still see my way, you shall understand what it means to hold the position in the City which is mine.'

'And—and—may I call upon Rosie?'

'Not till this day week—not till I have made my way plain.'

ACT IV

'AND so it means this. Oh, Rosie, you look lovelier than ever, and I'm as happy as a king. It means this. Your father is the greatest genius in the world. He buys my property for sixty thousand pounds—sixty thousand. That's over two thousand a year for me, and he makes a company out of it with a hundred and fifty thousand capital. He says that, taking ten thousand out of it for expenses, there will be a profit of eighty thousand. And all that he gives to you—eighty thousand, that's three thousand a year for you; and sixty thousand, that's two more, my dearest Rosie. You remember what you said, that when you married you should step out of one room like this into another just as good?'

'Oh, Reggie'—she sank upon his bosom—'you know I never could love anybody but you. It's true I was engaged to old Lord Evergreen, but that was only because he had one foot—you know—and when the other foot went in too, just a day too soon, I actually laughed. So the pater is going to make a company of it, is he? Well, I hope he won't put any of his own money into it, I'm sure, because of late all the companies have turned out so badly.'

'But, my child, the place is full of gold.'

'Then why did he turn it into a company, my dear boy? And why didn't he make you stick to it?'

But you know nothing of the City. Now, let us sit down and talk about what we shall do—Don't, you ridiculous boy !'

ACT V

ANOTHER house just like the first. The bride stepped out of one palace into another. With their five or six thousand a year, the young couple could just manage to make both ends meet. The husband was devoted ; the wife had everything that she could wish. Who could be happier than this pair in a nest so luxurious, their life so padded, their days so full of sunshine ?

It was a year after marriage. The wife, contrary to her usual custom, was the first at breakfast. A few letters were waiting for her—chiefly invitations. She opened and read them. Among them lay one addressed to her husband. Not looking at the address, she opened and read that as well :

' Dear Reginald,—I venture to address you as an old friend of your own and school-fellow of your mother's. I am a widow with four children. My husband was the Vicar of your old parish—you remember him and me. I was left with a little income of about two hundred a year. Twelve months ago I was persuaded in order to double my income—a thing which seemed certain from the prospectus—to invest everything in a new and rich gold mine. Everything. And the mine has never paid anything. The company—it is called the Solid Gold Reef Company—is in liquidation because, though there is really the gold there, it costs too much to get it. I have no relatives anywhere to help me. Unless I

can get assistance my children and I must go at once—to-morrow—into the workhouse. Yes, we are paupers. I am ruined by the cruel lies of that prospectus, and the wickedness which deluded me, and I know not how many others, out of my money. I have been foolish, and am punished; but those people, who will punish them? Help me, if you can, my dear Reginald. Oh! for *GOD'S* sake, help my children and me. Help your mother's friend, your own old friend.'

'This,' said Rosie, meditatively, 'is exactly the kind of thing to make Reggie uncomfortable. Why, it might make him unhappy all day. Better burn it.' She dropped the letter into the fire. 'He's an impulsive, emotional nature, and he doesn't understand the City. If people are so foolish. What a lot of fibs the poor old pater does tell, to be sure! He's a regular novelist—Oh! here you are, you lazy boy!'

'Kiss me, Rosie.' He looked as handsome as Apollo and as cheerful. 'I wish all the world were as happy as you and me. Heigho! Some poor devils, I'm afraid——'

'Tea or coffee, Reg?'

TO THE THIRD AND FOURTH GENERATION

I

HE was an austere person : always serious of visage and of speech : even as a young man he was a Knight of the Rueful Countenance : in middle age he seldom laughed : in old age he never even smiled. He was a philanthropist, but of the severe kind : he gave freely, but never with a cheerful face. Chiefly, he supported, by generous gifts of money, by voice and by pen, the various efforts made to reform prisoners of all kinds, male and female, especially those which were concerned with the interesting but difficult problem of Discharged Prisoners. He held meetings in his library on behalf of these unfortunates, whose real punishment, he urged, only begins when they come out : he spoke for them : he spoke with great earnestness and always effectively, though he had but one speech. He always ended his oration dramatically by throwing open his coat, to the imagination of the audience exposing a guilty bosom, and saying in hollow accents that if all secrets were known not one of us but should be occupying the cold and lonely cell of the convicted malefactor. Not a cheerful subject, this, but he made it the principal work of his life. He wrote a book

advocating the reception of the criminal, after his punishment, back into the bosom of society, as having expiated his sin by his captivity. In this book occurs the famous and often-quoted passage—you all know it—on the prisoner innocent and wrongly convicted. Also in his speech—his one speech—he never failed, before the peroration of the bared breast, to draw a moving picture of this unfortunate person. And by long practice he had become so eloquent that his audience never failed to be thrilled, through and through, though they had heard the speech a dozen times before. When they recovered they reflected that for so rich a man to be so austere was a compensation to set off against their own poverty. This reflection put an end to possible envy. To be so austere must take the joy out of wealth. Cheerfulness goes with a light purse. He who spends his life in thinking that he should be in prison if he had his deserts, ought to be—must be—rich.

He was now a man turned sixty, nearer seventy than sixty, a widower, with an only child, his daughter, the one survivor of six or seven children, a girl of nineteen. It has been stated that he was always of a grave disposition. But during the last four or five years he had become more than grave—more than austere. In private he was an ascetic. He lived on the plainest food: he did not use his carriage: he dressed as if he was a pauper: he walked with hanging head: he sat silent and depressed: and whenever he discharged his one speech he made the hollowness of his tones, the severity of his eye, and the baring of his breast assume a solemnity that was perfectly terrifying. He gave larger sums of money than ever

to his favourite sinners : he was the noblest patron ever known to the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society ; but for all his charities he grew no more cheerful. He was a just man in all his relations with servants and dependents : but he was not loved ; plain, simple, unadorned, perfect justice, is the one virtue which commands no love. A little uncertainty, a little—say—tendency to backslide—a little coming down here and there from the cold heights of perfection—is felt to be the kind of justice most proper to fallen man. When we have got up again after that fall, and brushed the mud and dust off our white robes, we shall perhaps begin to enjoy the cold perfection : but not till then.

His daughter Isabel had no sympathy at all with the Discharged Prisoner. She said that he ought not to have done it. He shouldn't have been a sinner, to begin with. Nor did she feel any pity for any sinner, male or female. She said that the sinner ought to be ashamed of himself or herself. Nor would she help the helpless person : she said that he ought to help himself : and if he could not, he had better go to the retreats kindly provided for incapables. As for the baring of the bosom she said it was rubbish, and that no one she knew deserved to go to prison, and if any of her friends were so deserving, they would cease to be her friends. And, so far from imitating the austerity of her father, she was a cheerful young woman, who laughed a great deal and went into society as much as she could.

The meeting was over. The austere philanthropist was left alone in the library—the great library filled with books whose very names he knew not, for he

read nothing. He walked up and down with bowed figure and hanging hands. Had he lifted his head you would have seen a face no longer austere, but haggard, torn with pain. Do you know the face of one who has endured mental or physical suffering for years—how watchful, how full of anxiety it is! Such was the face of this man. He did not lift his head: it was when the door was opened and his daughter looked in. ‘Is your meeting over? Was it a good meeting? Good Heavens!’ she cried, seeing his haggard face. ‘What is the matter?’

He sat down and made no reply for a few moments. ‘Child,’ he said, ‘it is that—that pain—of which I have spoken. You can do nothing. Never mind me, Isabel, I shall get better presently. Leave me here. Do not expect me at dinner. I shall be perfectly well in a little while—perfectly—perfectly well—when I have had a little rest—a little rest.’

‘You look very ill,’ she said anxiously, ‘let me bring you a glass of wine.’ She took his hand, laying her finger on his pulse. ‘There is no fever. Is it fatigue? Is it over-excitement at the meeting?’

‘Child,’ he said solemnly, ‘if we could lay bare the secrets of the heart, most of us would be found worse than the poor wretches whom we keep in prison—worse—far worse. When the punishment falls upon us—when we are stripped of all we love—all we desire—when the scourge that will pursue us to the third and fourth generation begins to fall——’

‘Father, you are morbid. Your work for the criminals has filled your brain with fancies. You must go away—you must live better.’

‘Yes, my dear, I will—I will live better—much better—if I can—if I am permitted. But you—you—oh! Child! to the third and fourth generation shall the curse extend. My dear, leave me here. Yes, I shall be better soon. I shall be well—perfectly well—to-morrow.’

He rose, laid his hands upon his daughter’s shoulders, and gently pushed her from the room.

Isabel left him. Before going to bed in the evening she looked into the library. Her father was writing; he nodded more cheerfully than he had done for months. He told her that he was already much better, and that she might go to bed without any uneasiness.

At eight o’clock in the morning the maids opened the library door. On the wooden chair at the table sat a dead body. Life and soul had fled. A little bottle on the floor showed how they had been driven out of the earthly home. The maids shrieked and fled. Isabel, called up, hurried downstairs. The dead head lay upon a bundle of papers tied up and sealed. These were inscribed, ‘For Isabel.’ Nobody saw the packet except his daughter, who slipped it into her pocket with a presentiment of something even more dreadful than the suicide.

When it was noised abroad that this man had committed suicide—this man of all men—this rich man—this charitable man—this man of large heart—there were many who remembered with what earnestness he had been wont to declare that were each to bare his guilty breast there would be revealed a criminal as vile as any who lay in prison. And those who thought of these hard, cold, and cruel words

asked each other what this man, for his part, could have done.

The coroner's inquest returned a verdict of 'temporary insanity.' With all that money and no trouble of any kind, what but temporary insanity could be the cause of suicide?

Isabel, in her own room, sat with the papers in her hand. She was reading them for the tenth time.

'My dear Child,—

'I am called upon to terminate ingloriously a life which has been for the last fifty years one long torture, one long punishment: torture and punishment deserved, yet not therefore the less terrible. It is torture the more intolerable because it concerns you. Yes, Isabel, I leave you a great fortune—which in the eyes of the world should make you happy: you are young and clever and, I believe, attractive. What girl would ask for more? Yet you have another inheritance which the world does not suspect: the inheritance of sin and sorrow which is to be yours and your children's, if you have any, to the Third and Fourth Generation. My daughter, it is I who have brought these woes upon you. Forgive me if you can. And resolve that they shall not be transmitted to others. Refuse to marry. At the last, then, whatever form your punishment—the punishment of the innocent for the guilty—may assume it will end with your death. You will pray to die early, as for your immortal soul the sins of the fathers cannot, I hope and believe, fall upon the Souls of the Children. What have I done?

'It was nearly fifty years ago. I was then a lad of eighteen just entered into my father's office.

Presently I fell into difficulties. Such is my distress of mind that I am unable at this distance of time to tell you how I fell into difficulties. I sometimes think that in mercy, or as an additional punishment, a curtain has fallen over this period of my life, because I cannot remember how I fell into difficulties. I remember only driving into town from Clapham Common with my father in the morning and driving home with him in the evening. And I remember working in the office all day and reading or talking, with family prayers, every evening. I can remember none of the extravagances and sins common (unhappily) to that time of life. Yet the fact remains—I fell into difficulties.

‘Why I did not confess to my father, I know not: I cannot remember. What I did, however, was this: I drew a cheque for an amount large enough to cover these difficulties, and I forged my father’s name. I cannot remember exactly what happened then—I mean—about the cheque—what I did with it or to whom I paid it. All I remember is that I forged my father’s name.

‘Suspicion fell upon a clerk who had been a school-fellow. His name was Farrier. I think that I somehow purposely caused him to be suspected. He was arrested: the evidence—of my contriving—was strong against him. He was committed for trial: he was found guilty and sentenced to seven years’ penal servitude.

‘I, the real criminal, stood by and said nothing. I observed silence.

‘For many years, so hard was my heart, so callous was my conscience, I lived in absolute care-

lessness about my crime—I almost forgot it: there were times when I did forget it. I never made any inquiry about the wretched victim of my wickedness. As he was never heard of, I suppose that he is either dead or has long since dropped down into the depths reserved for those unhappy men and women who have been imprisoned.

‘When my attention was directed to the condition of these persons, I began gradually, out of these depths, to call up the face of Farrier. At first his face was only full of wretchedness. Gradually it became full of accusation, and I realised for the first time what it was I had done.

‘Isabel, you know that I have pleaded the cause of the Discharged Prisoner with as much eloquence as I could command. I have written a book in which I claimed for him that, his punishment over, he should be reinstated in his work and received again into society. I was pleading my own cause; I was speaking for myself.

‘Of late Farrier’s face has changed to Farrier himself. He is always with me, day and night. “Why am I wretched?” he asks me, “Who has made me what I am? Suffer with me, you have made me what I am.” I have suffered with him, but what are his sufferings compared with mine?

‘To-night I end it—I shall appear before my Judge.

‘My dear daughter, I know not what form your punishment will take: the loss of earthly love, perhaps: the shame of having such a father, perhaps: the loss of your fortune, it may be: ill-health—I know not what. But it will be tempered for you because of your innocence.

‘Therefore, Isabel, it is my command that you seek out the unhappy man Farrier or his children, whose ruin I have wickedly compassed, and that you make such atonement as is possible, even to the uttermost farthing of your inheritance. This I solemnly charge and enjoin upon you. Spend upon him and his everything—all your money—all your thoughts—all your life. Make atonement to him—such atonement as you can—for the sake of your unhappy father who was the cause of all their misery.’

This was the paper which Isabel read through for the tenth time, while her father lay dead in a darkened chamber.

II

‘THIS,’ said the solicitor, laying down the papers which Isabel showed him the day after the funeral, ‘is the most wonderful document that I have ever read.’ Before him sat the girl in deep mourning, watching him with eager eyes.

‘Wonderful? You only call it wonderful?’ she replied. ‘I call it horrible—terrible—shameful!’

‘Wonderful, I call it. Because, my dear young lady, there is not one single word of truth in this self-accusation.’

‘Oh! If I could think so! But it is too—too circumstantial, and it explains everything—his austerity—his depression—even his continual repetition about the baring of the breast. Everything is explained. Oh! What am I to think? How can I continue to honour my father? What am I to do?’

‘You will honour him with acknowledging with me, that there is not a word of truth in it. But I agree with you, the document explains his depression of late years—growing deeper every day as the illusion grew stronger.’

Isabel shook her head. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I cannot think so. Would to Heaven I could!’

‘I perfectly remember the case that he recalls,’ the solicitor continued. ‘We were all school-fellows together, your father, the man—afterwards the criminal Farrier—and myself. When we left school, Farrier, who was a light-hearted, shallow lad, just the opposite of your father, used often to visit at the house. He contracted bad habits: he took to betting, gambling, drinking, and other dangerous courses: it is a stale old story: thousands of young fellows are going the same way at this moment. Well, he fell into debt: he got into difficulties: then he forged your grandfather’s name for a large sum: he was detected, tried, and found guilty. The evidence, mind, was the clearest possible: there was no defence whatever: the whole case took little more than half an hour. These facts should make the case quite clear to you. First, he made the cheque payable to the order of one of his associates whose name also he forged when he presented the cheque; next, that he presented the cheque himself; thirdly, that the notes were all traced to people in whose books he was in debt. Why, there was no question about the thing. Everybody in the office, I know, because I heard all that went on from day to day, was immensely relieved to find that the case was so simple that nobody else could be suspected of having any hand in it. You

know how horrible is the feeling of possible suspicion that sometimes seems to attach to everybody in an office where such a thing has happened. What do you think now ? ’

Isabel laid her hand upon the papers, ‘ This is my father’s confession,’ she said.

‘ Your father’s illusion. Why, I remember how very much cut up he was about it—his old school fellow—his old friend. Naturally he was cut up. Why, again, the fellow confessed the crime. Did he write a letter ? Did the chaplain bring a message ? I don’t know—I’m sure he confessed.’

‘ Show me his confession,’ said Isabel. ‘ Meantime, here is my father’s.’

‘ I remember, again, how he lived. My dear young lady, your father never had any salad days ; he never had any levities ; he was always a grave boy at school, he was a grave young man ; his father was a strong evangelical ; he was brought up most strictly ; it was a grave and religious household ; he came to the city in the morning with his father in his carriage and pair and drove home with him in the evening. I saw him constantly ; we went to the same church—Clapham Parish Church ; missionaries were entertained at the house ; meetings were held there ; your father sometimes spoke ; he had his Sunday school ; he had societies for self-improvement ; he was a most sober, quiet, God-fearing young man.’

‘ And here is his confession.’

‘ No. Here is the pretty piece of hallucination that you call his confession. Why, see how it breaks

down. He cannot remember the kind of difficulties into which he fell; he cannot remember the history of the cheque. It is all vague illusion that has grown up in his mind.'

'It is a clear and lucid statement.'

'Grown up in his mind, I say, by much dwelling upon the condition of discharged prisoners. It led to his believing that every one who had his deserts ought to be a discharged prisoner; and next to a revival of the old trouble about his former friend; and finally to a belief that he himself was the real forger in that unhappy case.'

'No,' said Isabel firmly. 'Here is his confession. Give me back the papers, Mr. Barry. I must keep them myself. At least, the world shall not know. What has become of that unhappy man?'

'The forger? I don't know. He has long since gone under. Dead, most likely.'

'If he is living, I will find him. If he has children, I will find them. I will make such atonement, even if it takes my last farthing, as I can. Atonement? Oh! What—what atonement is possible for the ruin of a life? Atonement? Oh! What atonement can avert the curse that lies upon me? For the third and fourth generation! Mr. Barry, do you think—do you think—that such an one as I—the child of such a—such as my poor father—could marry and bring upon children—innocent children—the curse that such a crime entails? Don't you see the doom that this revelation brings upon me?'

Now there was a certain young man interested in that girl whom the solicitor knew, and he took a

paternal interest in that young man, and therefore he hastened to expostulate.

‘My dear young lady,’ he urged solemnly, ‘how shall I persuade you? What can I say? The man confessed. I remember now, he wrote to your grandfather from prison and confessed.’

‘My father says that he committed the crime—that he was the real criminal. My father says this. Can I choose but believe? Would any man say a thing so terrible as this if it were not true?’

‘Says—oh! says. Why, it is part of his madness to believe it! I assure you that the evidence was overwhelming; the young man himself presented the forged cheque at the bank; the cheque book which he had stolen was in his possession; there could not be a clearer case?’

‘I cannot believe it. Nothing would make me believe it—except the man’s own assurance.’

‘Well, then, let us find the man if he still exists, and obtain his assurance. For my own part, I much prefer the evidence before the Court, and the charge of the judge and the verdict of the jury, to any assurance made by such a scoundrel.’

The girl took up the papers again and read aloud the words with which the confession ended: ‘“Therefore, Isabel, it is my command that you seek out this man, or his children, whose ruin I have wickedly compassed, and that you make such atonement as is possible, even to the uttermost farthing of your inheritance. This I solemnly charge and enjoin upon you.” But,’ said Isabel, looking up, ‘there shall be no children to bear that curse. My poor father was punished by the death of his wife and of all his

children except myself, and by a remorse which was as a flame within him.' Isabel uttered these terrible words with a hard and resolute voice. It was the lawyer who bent his head to hide the tears in his eyes.

'Poor man!' he said. 'What suffering! And all for a morbid brain!'

'No. The thing is true. My father could not write these words if they were not true. And now it only remains to find the man.'

III

FOR a year after this event there appeared once or twice a week in all the London papers, and in many of the provincial papers, not to mention those of America, India, Australia, Africa, New Zealand, and the Isles, an advertisement which ran as follows:—

'ONE HUNDRED POUNDS REWARD.—The above reward will be paid to anyone who will furnish the advertisers with the present place of residence of Percival Henry Farrier, or with proof of his death and the whereabouts of his children, if any. The said Percival Henry Farrier, if living, is now about 68 years of age. He was last heard of thirty-seven years ago. He was then a young man with light hair and blue eyes, and beardless. He had a good voice, and could play the piano and sing. He was of gentlemanly address. If the said Percival Henry Farrier will in person respond to this advertisement, he will hear of something greatly to his advantage.

'BARRY, PENNEFATHER, & STALLARD,

'Solicitors, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.'

‘No,’ said Mr. Barry, ‘we have had no serious reply. People have come fishing for information; dozens have written, saying that they know where the man is, and if we will send a ten pound note they will produce him. One woman called in deep mourning and said that her father, Percival Farrier, was just dead and buried. She was a past mistress of fiction. Well, how much longer are we to go on advertising?’

‘As long as I live, if necessary.’

‘I showed you what the police know about him. Your poor innocent victim became billiard sharper, welsher, confidence-trick man, card sharper, singer in low music-halls, and all the time drunkard and out-cast.’

‘He was naturally weak. We must forgive everything on account of the deep Wrong which he endured.’

‘Well! he has disappeared. He is dead, most likely. Who cares when such a creature dies? He is buried and is forgotten, as quickly as possible.’

‘Perhaps he has left children. We will go on searching.’

IV

ISABEL took to reading in a hospital. It was an occupation for her; it diverted her thoughts from the oppression which now hung over her like a cloud. She sat at bedsides in a ward, and read to sick people. It is a most charitable thing to do; the more so because, to most of us, it is so horribly tedious. She did it for a year or more until an accident—say rather a providential arrangement—caused her to desist, at least for a while.

It happened in this way:

Isabel walked one afternoon through the ward on her way to the reading. On either side, in the white beds, lay the patients. To the unprofessional eye there was little outward show of suffering. The men lay perfectly quiet; some were reading, some were sleeping; most of them lay with their eyes open, not caring for anything but rest and ease from pain. She stopped casually before one of the beds. It contained a new-comer, a man advanced in years; he was quite bald, and his face was beardless. The reason why she stopped was that, of all the faces she had ever seen, this was the most dreadful which glared at her from the pillow. Its owner seemed about seventy years of age, but he might have been eighty or ninety. Wreck, decay, and degradation were written plain and clear upon this face. Lost soul here, said the face. Long years of the life which knows neither honour, nor principle, nor self-governance, had stamped it with a seal as plain to read as the seal of a limited liability company. Even the most innocent person—even the child of the self-accused wicked man—could read upon this evil countenance bad drink, bad food, bad companions, bad habits, bad thoughts, and bad words. The man's face was red with spots and blotches, as if leprous; his nose was a red and shapeless lump; his cheeks and neck were puffed; his lips were swollen and uncertain; his eyes were shifty and suspicious. Every feature proclaimed, individually and separately, the lawless life. He was the very type of the Prodigal Son, grown old and unrepentant.

Isabel stood over the bed, and looked at this interesting case. The nurse joined her.

‘Pneumonia,’ she said. ‘You should have seen him when he came in—a mass of filth and rags. In this place we have our experiences, but there!’ Her gesture showed that the case was unspeakable.

The patient looked on, suspiciously listening, but said nothing.

‘He came here from a wretched doss-house,’ the nurse went on. ‘They brought him here because they thought it would be better if he died here than there. I think he is a regular old prison bird. However, here he is. By his name,’ she took up the card which hung at the foot of the bed and gave it to Isabel, ‘you see, he might have been a gentleman once. It isn’t exactly a——’

‘Good Heavens!’ cried Isabel. ‘It is the man we have been looking for so long. Tell me’—she bent over the patient—‘are you, really and truly, Percival Henry Farrier, the man who was convicted of forgery and sentenced to seven years’ imprisonment thirty-seven years ago?’

The evil face grew more evil to look at; the eyes more shifty and more suspicious. ‘Who are you?’ the man asked. ‘I ain’t done nothing to you that I know of.’ Gentleman or not, he had clearly forgotten the speech of civility.

‘Heaven knows I do not wish to do you any harm,’ Isabel answered, earnestly. ‘Are you that man?’

‘I’ve had trouble,’ he said doggedly. ‘I’ve repented, lady,’ he whined.

‘How have you lived since—you—you came out of——’

‘Honest work, lady—only honest work.’ But his eyes did not corroborate these comfortable words.

‘But you have been in prison since—not once, but many times.’

‘There’s always trouble for some folks. I’m one of the unlucky ones.’

‘When you recover—if you recover—and go out again, what shall you do?’

‘Honest work,’ he said, whining again. ‘I shall strive for honest work.’

‘This unfortunate man,’ Isabel turned to the nurse, ‘has led, I fear, a dreadful life. But he once suffered a terrible Wrong, and allowances must be made. His friends have been looking for him a long time. Now that he is found, we shall not let him go again. Make haste, my poor friend’—she laid her hand on the red and flaming brow—‘make haste to recover. We shall take care of you for the future. Your troubles are over.’

The victim of his own—or other people’s—wickedness received this intelligence with a look of profound suspicion. The very last thing that he desired, you see, was to be looked after; the one thing that remained to him was his freedom to live after his own heart, low down—wallowing among the swine. Besides, he had already, very unwillingly, been looked after a good deal. He had been looked after quite paternally, kept from doing any harm, and even from getting drunk, for long periods. Therefore, this young lady’s promise gave him no joy at all, but, on the other hand, filled him with a dreadful foreboding. Was he going to get well

again only to be looked after? Better, perhaps, the doss-house with its freedom and the drink.

V

THE next day this interesting patient had another visitor—Mr. Barry, the lawyer, to whom Isabel had communicated her discovery. He stood over the bed and thoughtfully, chin in hand, contemplated the wreck.

‘You are changed, Mr. Percy Farrier,’ he said presently, ‘since I saw you last.’

‘I don’t know you,’ the sick man replied, uneasy under those searching eyes.

‘You have forgotten, I daresay, the days when you were a gentleman. We were at school together, Farrier Secundus. I was Barry. Do you remember Barry?’ The man shook his head impatiently. ‘No?—You have forgotten those times, no doubt. Best to forget them. It was long before you became billiard sharper, welsher, confidence-trick man, writer of begging-letters, or any of your later professions. It was before you committed your first great crime. You remember that first crime?’ The man covered his head with the sheet. Mr. Barry drew it back. ‘Come,’ he said, ‘I am not going to worry you. In fact, I have good news for you.’

The man shook his head. ‘Good news? There can be no good news for me. Go away—leave me.’

‘What did you do it for—I mean the first forgery?’

‘I was in a mess—I don’t know what—and it looked so safe. I thought it *couldn’t* be found out.’

‘Just so. Well, I have good news for you. When you get well, you will not be allowed to go back to the

old life at all. You will be taken into custody ; you will be placed in comfortable quarters ; you will have as much of everything as you can desire.'

'I don't understand.'

'You will understand by degrees. Meantime get better—and if you think at all, it will be salutary for you to think of the days when we played cricket together on Clapham Common. Farrier Secundus—perhaps now Primus—you have got such a stroke of luck as you do not deserve. You are—let me see—about 68 or 69 years of age ; you are broken in health ; you are a hardened old prison bird. There is not in the whole country a more degraded wretch. Yet you are to have one more chance of repentance. You don't deserve it, but you are to have it. Make the best of it.'

Mr. Barry turned and walked thoughtfully down the ward. The man looked after him as he had looked after Isabel, with troubled eyes. To be taken into custody—to be placed in comfortable quarters—suggested some kind of prison. But he was too weak to think much.

'Do what you please for him,' said Mr. Barry to Isabel. 'He won't live long. But give him nothing—or, better still—promise him nothing. When it comes to the giving, I shall have something to say myself. Meantime, your father—remember—was under the most miserable hallucination that ever fell upon any man.'

VI

A MONTH later Isabel stood with her interesting recovery before a pretty little cottage a few miles out of

London. It was quite an ideal cottage, covered with creeping and clinging things, roses, wisteria, passion flower, clematis—porch and walls, and even the roof; standing in its own garden; a low cottage of two rooms below and three above. The patient, greatly improved in appearance, was dressed like a gentleman; his face, owing to the hospital treatment, had lost its puffiness and its blotches; his features were no longer swollen; they had become even refined by the purgatory of pneumonia; his thin nostril was almost transparent; he stooped and moved feebly, for his illness had left weaknesses of various kinds, and he looked very old. Nobody, however, could mistake him for a venerable old man, or a good old man, on account of those shifty eyes glancing with suspicion here and there; his hands hung dangling—you know the dangling hand? It betokens servitude, or, at least, obedience and discipline. The soldier has it; the valet has it; and the prison bird has it. You may always know the prison bird by those hands that have dangled so long and so often before the officials of the prison.

Arrived at the porch, Isabel preached a short sermon, to which the penitent listened with apparent interest.

‘Mr. Farrier,’ she said solemnly, ‘this cottage is only the beginning of what you will receive. But your return to—your better self—must be, I am well aware, gradual. You are repentant, I believe.’ He groaned in corroboration of that faith. ‘Truly repentant. That is something. Remember that whatever you have done, I do not blame you. Weakness followed on a Great Wrong.’

‘A Great Wrong,’ echoed the penitent. He didn’t know what it was, but he saw that the words were mighty in results.

‘You have never spoken to me of that Great Wrong, but I know it, and for the sake of it you shall—well—on that subject I cannot speak. Here I leave you. The cottage is furnished for you; the rent will be paid for you; every Saturday you will receive the sum of three pounds; you will find a respectable woman engaged as your servant. I think you will find everything that you can possibly want. You are safely removed from your old companions. And now I leave you to the companionship of—your better self. Be true to your promises and all will be well with you.’ She took his dangling hand and squeezed it, just like the chaplain of the prison, who always squeezed that flabby and dangling hand, which is the reason why hand-shaking, to all prison birds, represents religion.

He followed her with troubled eyes as she walked down the street. What did this mean? Nothing at all was said about work, nothing about going to church, yet she shook hands with him. And in his pocket were three sovereigns. He went out into the road and looked up and down the village street. A little way off there hung a sign. He marched as briskly as his feebleness allowed in the direction of the public-house.

‘He is what his misfortunes have made him,’ said Isabel. ‘We must have patience. Meantime, he seems resolved, I hope for the best. He promises faithfully to abstain from drink. He weeps as he promises amendment. After all his misfortunes there

remains an emotional nature, and he is so easily led that one hopes the very best. I shall leave him quite alone, to think and feel his way back to his better self—for one month.'

VII

BUT it was less than a month after this that Isabel had to visit her penitent. She acted like the policeman, from information received. She stood in the sitting room of the cottage. Alas! The room was bare; there was nothing at all in it; there was no furniture of any kind; it was horribly dirty; she stepped into the kitchen, that also was bare. She climbed the stairs; in one room there was a bed with a blanket on it, and nothing else. She descended the stairs and went out of the cottage into the porch with a sinking heart. Presently there came along the road slowly, for he was still feeble, the tenant of the cottage. His clothes should have been respectable, but were not, because he had no collar and no waistcoat, and his flannel shirt was torn at the neck. Mr. Percival Farrier, in this new guise, looked even more disgraceful than when he lay in his hospital cot. His face was swollen again, and was more dreadful than ever; his eyes, his nose, his mouth, had all relapsed into their former condition before the time of hospital. Where—oh! where—were the outward signs of penitence?

'What is the meaning of this, Mr. Farrier?' Isabel asked. 'Where is the furniture?'

'Sold,' he replied. 'Everything is sold'—his voice was a little thick. 'All sold to assist a pore man,

another pore man who has been in trouble. There's lots of us—lots of us—trouble everywhere.'

'Where is your servant—the woman who was to take care of you?'

'Gone. I sent her away. She drank. She filled the house with her wicked companions.'

'You are lying,' said Isabel, sternly. 'She is a most respectable woman. I placed you in this cottage where you could be safe from your former associates. I have heard from the vicar of your wickedness. You bring your old companions here—to this peaceful village; you sell the furniture, you turn out the woman, you make the house a scandal with your drunken orgies. This must stop. I shall have to find you another kind of home. Oh! I hoped—from what you promised—I hoped so differently.'

The man began to whine. 'That Wrong,' he began. 'That what you told me about. That Great Wrong!'

'Promise him nothing,' said Mr. Barry, a second time.

'He is what that Great Wrong has made him,' said Isabel. 'We must have patience. I owe him so much—oh! so much—even to the uttermost farthing. I must give him everything—all my youth and all my life—and nothing will atone. But you are right. If we give him money now, he would become a greater wreck than ever. We must have patience.'

VIII

ISABEL took him to her own house, debased and drunken as he was. She got a strong woman whom

she knew to watch over him all day. She made him go decently clothed, and she kept him sober. Now the man, with a docility which astonished her, because she did not understand that it was the docility of the prison, born of long obedience to rigid rules, obeyed her in everything without a murmur. He accepted whatever food was placed before him; he even accepted books, and made pretence to read them. But his eyes were always watching—watching—either with a purpose or a fear—following his nurse or his gaoler.

‘I cannot make him talk,’ Isabel told the lawyer. ‘His memory seems gone. He even bears no resentment for the Wrong.’

‘I should like to catch him bearing any resentment,’ Mr. Barry interrupted.

‘This silence is a beautiful trait. He must know who I am, and he will not shame me by speaking of—the truth. Yet the memory of the Wrong must still burn in his breast. His behaviour is beautiful. Sometimes he weeps. I think of him as of an innocent man condemned—oh! it is dreadful—to live among the refuse and wreckage of the world till he has forgotten what he was. But always docile and child-like.’

When she went home she found the strong woman, the custodian, in despair. Her charge had escaped. He had just walked openly out of the front door.

Isabel reflected. Then, by inspiration, ‘Let us,’ she said, ‘search the public-houses round.’ They found him in one of them. He was drinking fast and furious; he was drinking with the thirst of one who has been cut off for many days; he was already too drunk to stand—too drunk to speak.

Sadly they bore him home and laid him in his bed.

In his pocket his nurse found a pawn ticket and a sovereign. And a clock was missing, which was discovered to be represented by this pawn ticket.

Isabel spoke to him in the morning. He was deeply penitent; he groaned and wept. Isabel pointed out that such an outbreak showed that his better self, which it should be his sole object to regain, was as yet a long way off. She assured him once more that she had no reproaches to offer him—only patience and pity. ‘You are what you are,’ she said, ‘through the weakness that followed your Great Wrong.’

Then the work of reformation began again. That is to say, the man became once more, stealthily, docile. A week later it was discovered that he had again escaped. He had lowered himself out of his bedroom, which was on the first floor. And where had he gone? The public-houses were searched, but nothing was discovered.

Isabel went to her adviser. ‘As for his retreat,’ he said, ‘it will be easy to find him. He will go back to his old friends and his old life. Let him go, Isabel.’

‘No, I will never let him go. He is my charge. I atone for my father’s sin.’

They found him, in fact, that same day in the doss-house which he had formerly frequented. He had had time to get drunk, and half sober, and drunk again; had pawned all his clothes and was dressed again in rags. They put him into a cab and carried him back. In the morning he seemed to have forgotten everything. Some kind of fever followed, and he was kept in bed for two or three days. When he got up he was too weak to run away. Isabel tried persuasion

again. Her exhortation recalled fond memories of the chaplain, and produced exactly the same effect. He listened ; he wept ; he said dutifully what was expected of him. Experience had taught him to speak of repentance, amendment, and honesty. So he spoke of them glibly, and with the starting tear.

One day there appeared a change in him—a very odd change. He became talkative ; he answered questions ; he showed interest. Isabel congratulated herself. The corner was turned ; he was now passed out of the crushed and passive stage ; he was ready to resume his own responsibility. She asked him about his old life. He was quite ready to tell everything. He told her so much that she was fain to stop him. For it was a revelation of things incredible and impossible.

Next day the same thing, and the day after. Then a very sad discovery was made. For when they awoke in the morning, behold, the patient was found in the cellar, lying in the sawdust under the tap of a beer barrel. Once more he was carried up and put to bed.

Deprived of this resource, he relapsed into apathy.

‘Let him go,’ said Mr. Barry. ‘Indeed, you have no right to keep him. He is not your prisoner.’

‘He is my charge,’ said Isabel. ‘But I will give him his liberty.’

She opened the doors for him. She gave him money.

‘If you want to go away,’ she said, ‘do so. Go back, if you can, to your old companions. Whatever you do, I shall never reproach you. Return when you

please. This house is your own. Go away if you please. Come back when you please.'

He shuffled away feebly, with his shifty eyes and his dangling hands.

A week later he came back. Isabel was out. He was allowed, by her order, to enter and to go about unwatched. He stole some trifles from the drawing-room, and disappeared with them.

During the whole of that summer he came at intervals. He came in rags and dirt; he knocked at the door and was admitted without a word. If Isabel was at home she came out and shook hands with him politely, asking him if he were well, and ignoring the appearance and the degradation of him. I know not what he understood of the position, more than that here was a Lady of Whims, who gave him money and allowed him to take anything he pleased, and called him Mr. Farrier, as if he were still a gentleman.

One morning he came again after an absence of three or four weeks. His limbs trembled and shook; his eyes were unnaturally bright; his face was swollen; he was terrible to look upon.

'Mr. Farrier,' said Isabel, taking his hot hand. 'You look ill. Will you sit down?'

The man looked round the room: he saw nothing to take: his eyes fell upon Isabel's watch and chain.

'You want my watch and chain? Take it, Mr. Farrier, take anything that I have. All is yours in atonement for that Great Wrong.'

'That Great Wrong,' the man repeated.

'But you look ill, Mr. Farrier, and your hand is hot. Will you stay here and rest a little?'

In answer the poor wretch clutched greedily at

the watch which the girl handed him. Then his limbs bent under him, and he fell in a heap on the floor.

IX

‘HE is dying,’ said the doctor a day or two later. ‘I wonder that he has lasted so long. He must have had a wonderful constitution. He will become comatose presently. And he will probably die unconscious.’

Isabel returned to his bedside. It was another and a last attack of pneumonia which had laid him low.

‘Mr. Farrier,’ she said, ‘I have done what I could for you. Forgive me before you die. Forgive my father. Do you understand me? Then say you forgive us for the Great Wrong.’

He opened his eyes and looked suspicious. ‘Great Wrong?’ he repeated. ‘Great Wrong? What d’yer mean—you and the Great Wrong. Always going on about the Great Wrong. It’s all wrong—seems to me.’

‘You remember, surely,’ Isabel went on. ‘The wrongful charge—the cruel silence—the trial—the sentence—you cannot forget that time.’

‘What’s the use of remembering?’ asked the dying man. ‘I served my time—I done the thing and I served the time for it, didn’t I? Well, then, what d’yer mean? When a man has done time the thing ought to be finished.’

‘You did the thing? You?’ Isabel bent over the bed eagerly. ‘Do you mean this? Is it true?’

‘I told the judge I done it. I told the chaplain I

done it—well, and I paid for it. I was a gentleman once. I paid for it.’ He had: his face, his speech, his eyes, proclaimed the price he had paid for it.

‘Stay, am I in my senses? Man! You are dying, tell me—you are dying—in the name of the Great Judge, before whom you will appear to-day—to-morrow. In the name of GOD, who forged that cheque?’

‘I forged it. Who else could ha’ done it? Done it? I done it—I done it,’ he repeated with a last spark of energy. ‘And I done time for it.’

‘You? You?’ Isabel could say no more. The man closed his eyes wearily and seemed to fall asleep. Isabel sat by the bedside waiting for a return to consciousness. But there was none: he breathed heavily: the poor wreck, beaten and battered out of all resemblance to that better self, would strike upon no more rocks.

‘It was then, after all,’ said Isabel, ‘pure hallucination.’

‘Pure hallucination,’ repeated the solicitor. ‘It came of brooding too long upon one class of suffering and punishment. Perhaps the original cause was this very case, which your father took greatly to heart, and never forgot. His own friend, his personal friend, whom he loved. I have here—I meant to show it to you in case you should do anything more than—more than commonly extravagant—the man’s detailed account of the crime, and how he did it. He dictated it when he was in the hospital.’

‘No, thank you. I do not wish to see it. I have seen enough. Oh! It was hallucination after all. My poor father, how he must have suffered! What

shame ! What self-reproach ! Oh ! And I am free. I can look the world again in the face—free from that awful sense of hereditary shame !’

‘You are free, my dear young lady, as you have always been ; but you had no more faith than Doubting Didymus. Well, as to what you were saying a year ago’—the solicitor thought of that young man already referred to—‘about the Third and Fourth Generation, you know. You will, I suppose, now feel yourself able to—to change your views, and to—to consult your own happiness.’

‘I shall consider,’ said Isabel, blushing.

KING DAVID'S FRIEND

I

‘HAVE you got your letters by the mail, Longden ?

‘No, I haven’t, my son. I never do get any letters by the mail. I have long since left off expecting any letters by the mail.’

His chum, who was quite a new arrival, and did not know anything at all, or he would not have asked, looked surprised.

‘Why, man, I’ve been here fifteen years—fifteen years; think of that, fifteen years in this corner of the world—this forgotten colony. If I had been a coolie—a simple coolie when I came here—if I had died a dozen years ago—if my grave were trodden level with the ground, I couldn’t be more forgotten than I am.’

His words read more bitterly than they sounded, because Old Longden—everybody in the office called him Old Longden—was never bitter. He neither grumbled nor railed at fate.

‘But—but you’ve got friends at home. You must have people . . . ’

‘I have. Oh! yes, I have people. There’s my elder brother, for instance—my brother the Prig; I’ve got him. I assure you there is nobody with a keener

sense of duty than my brother the Prig. And there are cousins by dozens, first and second, besides cousins removed I don't know how many times. And I had a father, but he is dead, poor old man! Friends? Plenty of friends. Plenty of friends; but I've lived here fifteen years. As for friendships—well, once I had a real, true, devoted, loyal friend. Never was such a friend. We out-did David and Jonathan. So far as I know, David never . . . but then Jonathan died young, and perhaps there were passages . . . However, ours was a divine, an ideal friendship: no two friends were ever more so, because, you see, in our friendship, which was on the highest possible planes of friendship, what one gives the other has to accept.' He talked rather incoherently, lying back in his chair and gazing up at the rafters. 'The world doesn't understand this; for there is no friendship in business, and we are mostly business men. Therefore there are no friends left like us. One had to accept what the other gave. Oh! he had no choice in the matter.'

'I don't understand.'

'No more do I—now. It was magnificent, but it wasn't business. . . . Well, as I said, I had a true friend once, a more than pal, a closer than brother. Where is that true friend now?'

'When you go home again——'

'I never shall go home again, sonny. This is my home. Very thankful I ought to be to have such a home: what more can a man desire? A walk under an umbrella and a helmet every day at half-past nine. Other men, higher up, drive. I can't—but then walking promotes a healthy action. From ten

to four, the healthful labour of the office. Home to this most desirable bungalow by five; a cup of cold tea; a little tobacco; a stroll on the shore till half-past six or so. Dinner—the finest dinner in the world, with the best claret in the world.’ His companion grinned. ‘A pipe with whisky and water till nine; then bed till six. A lovely life, isn’t it? Rich and full, self-contained; no nasty disturbances of its satisfying monotony; no change of scene, no society: no sport, no amusements, no literature, no pictures, no plays, no music to jar upon the even flow. No promotion, even, to agitate the soul.’

‘You will get promotion some day. You must. Oh! it is shameful. Everybody put up over your head!’

‘You will get promotion, you boy. As for me——’ he sighed, and then he laughed. ‘What does it matter? I draw two hundred rupees a month. I am a junior in the Audit Office. I live in this agreeable bungalow of three rooms and a verandah. Its walls are made of packing cases, and its roof is made of the tin which formerly lined those cases: it is surrounded by a lovely compound containing three ragged bananas and a prickly pear: and it is furnished sumptuously—Behold! Style—Second Empire, for the most part.’

The furniture, perhaps, did date back to that now remote period. There was not much of it, however. Two long chairs, without which life in that climate would be intolerable; two small chairs, a table and an old sideboard completed the inventory. A cheap lamp stood on the table, where there was a bottle, a

jug of water, two glasses, and a pile of moths who had immolated themselves at the lamp. The walls were covered with a cheap, gaudy paper. Two white umbrellas stood in a corner. There was a shelf with a dozen books on it. There was nothing else at all—no pictures, no ornaments, no little trifles. On the floor there were no mats.

‘Nothing is omitted in the luxury and refinement of our surroundings. We are waited on by the most faithful of Hindoos, at twenty rupees a month. This it is to shake the pagoda tree for fifteen years.’

The speaker, a man with a countenance still healthy and ruddy, spite of his tropical experience, and wearing a big brown beard, a large-limbed man, lay back in his chair and replaced his pipe between his lips. He spoke, as is evident, bitterly, but his face was not bitter and his eyes were as kindly as the eyes of any Silver King, or Lord of a Nitrate boom, could be. The other was a young man of one and twenty, just beginning his career in the same splendid service which had taken away the elder man's youth. The united resources of this mess were slender; and when the rent of twenty rupees a month had been paid and the wages of their one servant and the dhobie and the claret (which was dear at fivepence the bottle) and the whisky and the stringy beef, which was stewed, and the skinny chicken, which was curried, were all paid for, there really was very little left for the minor luxuries. Yet, in lands where twice a year there falls no shade on any side of rock or house, the minor luxuries are to most men the simplest necessities. On either side of the central room, called the Salon, was a small bedroom, in each

a bed, a mosquito curtain, an armoire, a chair and a washstand. The room in front opened upon a small verandah, hung with coarse canvas for shade.

‘Well, my boy,’ Longden went on, ‘you shall have better luck: you shall get promoted early; you shall leave me and mess with other promotions; you shall become chief clerk, presently, in your department; acting Head of a department; sent off to some other colony as Head; Colonial Secretary somewhere else; Lieutenant-Governor; C.M.G.; Governor; K.C.M.G. Heart up, sonny; the world is all before you.’

He slowly rose and mixed a muckle tumbler of whisky and water which he tossed off at a draught, for it was the middle of the hot season, when one may absorb the muckle tumbler at a single toss and feel dry the moment after. It was so hot that even the exertion of moving from chair to table brought out beads upon the hands: there was no breath of air; outside it was quite dark; and there were no sounds except the shrill-voiced cigale too high and piercing for some ears to hear it at all, and from an old cemetery not far away, the whispering and the sighing of the filhao, a tree which, in the stillest night, never ceases thus to murmur and to sob and to mourn for the dead who lie below. It was a night when one is fain to lie down for very weariness of keeping head erect and arms ready for action, knowing full well that sleep will come slowly and only when one is wearied out with turning in the bed and gasping for breath.

The younger man was a little disconcerted at this outburst; when one is twenty it is hard to understand

that a man of five and thirty, which seems an age so advanced, and a man who has somehow 'stuck' in his upward flight, and one who is invariably cheerful and apparently contented, should ever have had ambitions. To a young man it seems natural that the unsuccessful should make the best of things.

To be sure, Longden's case was exceptional. There are plenty of shady Englishmen who get taken on in a colony, in obscure branches of the Government services, with never a chance or a hope of promotion; but for a young man to be actually appointed and sent out by the Colonial Office at the age of twenty, to begin, as he should, with his foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, and then to be left there, or very near the lowest rung, is not common in any colony. A slow but steady rise awaits everybody. But Longden got no rise. After fifteen years he still remained a junior in his department; he drew, it is true, two hundred and forty pounds a year, or double his original pay, but he had been passed by all his contemporaries and now remained stuck fast, apparently forgotten. Nor did any one of the successive Governors recommend him for promotion. Yet he was a good civil servant, as intelligent and laborious as could be desired. Moreover, a gentleman—using the word in its old and narrow meaning—an English gentleman; everybody could see that; a man of easy, assured, and pleasant manners; a man whose origin and belongings were well known; a 'likely' man, too, who should have been useful in society, though he never went anywhere, and nobody ever asked him anywhere. Always apparently cheerful and contented, going about his work with the same thorough-

ness, and marching off home to his little bungalow in the least desirable part of the town, by the sea shore, where no other Englishman lived, with an air and appearance of perfect content.

When people talked about Longden, which was not often, they lowered voice and looked around and whispered that there was some scandal about him which stood in the way of his promotion—something he had done at home, a long time ago—that it was understood he was not to be promoted. The thing that he had done remained a bogie, amorphous, its actual shape and figure impossible to make out. Here, however, was the fact: an English gentleman, of good and old family, very well connected, very well educated, of excellent manners, with no appearance of having anything to hide, left in the lower branches of the Colonial Service, five and thirty years of age; yet possessed of every quality that should command success. What did it mean? Meantime, he generally had living with him one or two young fellows newly come out whom he kept for a while under his wing, and saved at the outset from drink, gambling, and the devil, which very powerfully assail the newcomer in this dull colony. When they could walk alone he let them leave him and find some more cheerful, and more expensive ‘bachelors’ mess.

‘Hallo! There’s some news in the “Overland Mail,”’ said the young fellow, opening the paper. ‘We’ve got a new Governor. He comes out next mail. Here’s the paper. Want to see who it is?’

‘Not that it matters to me,’ said Longden. ‘Governors come and Governors go. But, out of idle curiosity, let me look.’

His chum tossed over the paper. There was a half column hastily printed with a summary of the month. Longden glanced down the paragraphs. Suddenly he started, sat up and dropped the paper. 'Good Lord!' he cried.

'What is it?' asked his companion.

Longden sprang to his feet. Then he stepped out upon the little verandah before the cottage and began to walk up and down with an energy worthy of his native land in an east wind. The young man, astonished, read the half column of paragraphs again. The usual crop of news, a big strike, a murder, reports, rumours and whispers from Berlin and Russia; the appointment of the new Governor for the Colony; what was it that had stung Longden into the excitement? Well, Longden would tell him if he pleased; if not—he yawned—it was past nine. He went to bed.

Presently Longden came back and took up the paper, and read slowly a second time the paragraph that had startled him. 'Sir Henry Overston Dunkeld, K.C.B., is the newly appointed Governor. Sir Henry Dunkeld, the eldest son of Major General Dunkeld, R.A., was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he obtained a first class and a fellowship in the year 1875. He was called to the bar in 1878; he sat in the House of Commons for the borough of Ilchester on the Conservative side from 1879 to 1882. He was then appointed Lieutenant-Governor of Penang; in 1884 he was made Governor of the Leeward Islands. Sir Henry is believed to have shown the highest administrative abilities; he is personally popular; he is said to possess a great charm of manner; and his

sympathies with all religious and philanthropic movements are well known.'

'Good Lord !' said Longden once more. 'And I am an assistant clerk in his Audit office ! Turn, Fortune, turn thy wheel ! And yet—can she turn that wheel ? Can I suffer any good thing at his hands—any good thing at all ? For, in our friendship—when we were friends—each had to accept what the other gave. I gave. He accepted. But he can never give, nor can I accept. My friend ! My David ! Thou art King ! Thou art King—and Lo ! I am assistant clerk in thy Audit Office. O King, live for ever !'

II

HE stood looking at the paper. The lamp, a cheap and common thing, filled with cheap and common petroleum, fluttered and expired. He stepped out again upon the verandah. The sea breeze had sprung up ; the air was refreshed ; he drew a long breath and looked out into the darkness. His memory went back some seventeen years. A certain morning returned to him ; for that matter, he had never forgotten that morning, nor any single thing that had been said or done on that morning. But now, for the first time, he saw what happened, not as he saw it then, an actor in the scene, but from the outside, as the audience. The actors were two spectres of the past, young men both ; the face of one was radiant, his eyes and cheeks flushed, his lip trembling. The other was also flushed, but his eyes were dropped, his head hung, his voice faltered.

'Harry,' cried one of them in agitation, 'you didn't do it ! You didn't really do it ! Say you didn't !'

'I can't say it, Jack.' The other young man buried his head in an agony of shame. 'I can't say it.'

'Harry, what will *she* say?'

'Good God! I don't know. What will they all say?'

'What will *she* say?' Jack repeated.

'I don't know. I don't know. What will become of me?'

'What will *she* say?' Jack repeated. 'Man! is there no way out of it?'

'None. I had the money. I took the money—I signed the thing.'

'Isn't there any way at all out of it? Would your father——?'

'My father? Why, Jack, the mere suspicion of such a thing would kill him. I *had* to get the money, Jack. I *had* to get the girl out of the place——'

'Oh!' Jack groaned, 'what will she say? And everybody—I too—have thought you so—— Harry, where was it done?'

'In this house.'

'In our house—here—Harry?' Jack leaned over and whispered, 'I was in the house, too.'

'You?'

'I was in the house. Think! The other party has gone. She won't come back to trouble you any longer. She's gone to America, you say.'

'She has sworn that she never will.'

'Who is to find out, then? Harry, we must save her. She must never know. Everything must go on as before except that . . . You see, there were two young men in the place . . . Eh? The thing was done

by one of them . . . Eh? Now do you see? Two young men—it was done by one of them.'

'Jack, what do you mean?'

'It was done—by me.'

Harry gazed at his friend. Then he shook his head.

'By me, I say.'

'No, Jack; no, I can't.'

'Damn it, man, you must! It is for her sake. Look here, old man; for your sake I would do a good deal, but I couldn't do this. It's for her sake, and because she loves you—that's the reason.'

'And because you love her still. Oh, Jack, I cannot!'

'You must, my boy—and you shall. All you've got to do is to hold your tongue. Get back to Cambridge. And hold your tongue.'

'No, Jack,' he murmured. 'I cannot let you do it. No friend can expect such a thing of another. Not even of you can I take such a service.'

'Why?' said Jack—Longden's name, in fact, was Jack, but it was fifteen years since he had been called by his Christian name, and he had almost forgotten it. 'Why, man, what's the good of being friends if we can't stand by each other? Look here: it's a real devil of a mess.'

'It is, indeed. To me it is ruin—everything—everything is lost, including——'

'It includes,' said Jack—'it includes Eva. Good God! Who is to tell her? How is it to be broken to her? Mind—at any cost she must be spared.'

'Well, Harry, sooner than Eva should suffer—sooner than you should suffer—I would suffer myself.'

Now, look here—I've done this thing—you know—not you at all—not you at all.' He laid his hand upon his friend's shoulder and repeated, 'I've done it—I'm the fellow—not you at all.'

'No, no—I cannot. Think of the awful—the terrible consequences.'

'There will be a bit of a shindy. I daresay it will blow over. My prig of an elder brother will groan and say he always knew—but you will be happy, old man, and—and so—what is the use of being friends, and sworn friends, too, if we are not to bear the burdens of each other? I shall take this burden off your back, old man—not for your sake only, but for the sake of—of Eva.'

The other protested, but weakly and with tears and self-accusations; it was too great a sacrifice; he had been a fool and a wretch; he must take the consequences. Jack continued to remind him that there was that other person to be seriously considered, namely, the girl named Eva. She must never—never know; she must never—never—never suspect. Not one word, or hint, must be dropped that would lead her to suspect. Above all things, she was to be kept from the unhappiness which would fall upon her if she knew.

Then the other man finally gave way. But he made a condition of accepting; one condition, and that of an extremely important character. So much grace was left to him. He sat down and he wrote at head-long speed a certain little narrative. This he signed, dated, read through, folded and gave to his friend.

'Jack,' he said, 'I will accept your sacrifice on one condition. Here is a complete confession of the whole business. Take it. Do what you like with it. If you

suffer too much from the consequences of your—your—self-sacrifice, reveal it—I am altogether in your hands. If at any time in the future you wish to recover any respect of which this business may have robbed you, do so by means of that paper—use it. I place myself wholly in your hands. I give you the right to use that paper whenever you please. Good Heavens! I to give you anything? I to make any conditions?’ He choked.

‘He certainly said that,’ murmured the audience. ‘He said it—and I have the paper still. And he is Governor of this colony, and I am a Junior in his Audit Office!’

Then he looked again—always across the blackness of the night into the past—and he saw a girl. She turned her eyes from one to the other in astonishment. A very beautiful girl she was. At the sight of her the audience caught his breath.

‘Why,’ she said, ‘what is the matter with you both?’

‘Eva!’ cried the man whose burden was to be transferred, but said no more.

‘Eva,’ said Jack, ‘I am sorry you have come at this moment. But you may as well hear the truth at once.’

‘Truth? What truth?’ She looked quickly, not at Jack, but at the other.

‘The truth is,’ said Jack, ‘that a very disgraceful thing has been found out, and that one of us is going to say good-bye—most likely for ever.’

‘What is it, Harry?’ She caught him by the arm. ‘Why do you look like this? What is the meaning of this, Jack?’

‘He looks ashamed and downcast, because he is my friend, Eva. I have shamed him. You see—don’t

look too much astonished, Eva—I am trying to brazen it out. I have done a thing which is very disgraceful. I am not going to defend myself, or to explain, or to excuse. I have done this thing and my friend is pained. Now you had better go away, both of you, because I don't want to witness your shame and pain. That hurts, Eva, worse than—to—to have done it.'

'Yes—he said all that,' murmured the audience. 'And then they went away—Eva was crying—she offered the guilty man her hand, and he refused. And then there was an end of everything.'

Next he saw how the guilty man laughed without the least mirth and folded the confession and placed it in his pocket-book. 'Well,' he said, 'I would have done more than that for Eva's sake, not to speak of poor old Harry. I don't suppose she will ever know that I took over his iniquities—or why I did it—and so—but it's done. Now we must face the footlights.'

The scene disappeared and the black night returned. Longden was on the verandah again looking out into the darkness; he heard the gentle lapping of the water on the coral reef and the knell of the Bell Buoy tolling out at sea beyond the harbour; and the filhaos wept louder and sighed more heavily in the fresh sea breeze.

'Yes,' said Longden. 'I was eighteen and I believed in friendship. What did the other man believe in?'

And he remembered how the Thing which he had so hastily assumed in order to save the girl he loved—who loved the other man—was really a much more serious thing than he had at first believed in fact; it was a thing which stains for life; a thing which leaves a mark visible and plain to be seen, and one which will

never—never—never wash off; a thing for which he was immediately expelled his home by his father, who refused to receive him, or to see him, or to forgive him; for which, in fact, he was presently, and after a year or two of ignominious Coventry, bundled off to a small clerkship in a distant colony, with no farewells except from his elder brother—the Prig—who informed him coldly that it was never too late, even for the worst of malefactors, to build up a new character on the ruins of one which had been destroyed. He also informed him that it had been his duty to place on record, for the information of the Colonial Office, the history of the Thing which the new clerk had done.

‘When Jonathan died,’ Longden murmured, ‘David wept and lamented. Suppose Jonathan had disappeared only to be recovered in the position of an inferior clerk to the Jerusalem Audit Office when David was King over Israel.’

He went to his room and lay down in the dark. But he slept little, and when he awoke in the morning it was with an uneasy sense of having himself become King David, and of having found his old friend Jonathan, dressed as a scribe, adding up with zeal the accounts in the chief steward’s chamber, and of being himself, king though he was, considerably embarrassed by the discovery.

III

THE monotony of his life, which he had praised so highly, was rudely broken by this strange event. The colony was so limited as to size, the officials so small in number, that the Governor would certainly

know something about everyone in the service, even a Junior in the Audit Office. He would have to know all the civil servants by name and reputation at least, and there was not the least doubt that King David would discover his Jonathan. Sir Henry Ovenston Dunkeld, king, would discover his old friend John Lorimer Longden among the scribes of the palace. What would the king say? What would the king do? Would he call for a purple robe and wrap it round that scribe, and send him forth upon a white horse richly caparisoned, with a trumpeter proclaiming the honours done by order of the king? Or should Jonathan begin it? Should he bow himself down upon the ground saying, 'O King, live for ever! I am Jonathan, friend of thy youth, and I am held down in low estate by reason of a Thing?' How would that do?

Longden pondered the subject long and doubtfully. What would happen? As for the confession he had it still. He had always kept it: the paper lay among other papers in a desk. This desk contained many cheerful reminders of that event. There was the letter from his father casting him off; there was one from his elder brother preaching a powerful sermon on the crime as to a condemned criminal; there was a portrait of a girl—the Eva for whose sake his friend had consented; there was another of the friend himself, a gallant youth; there were some letters from that friend, written before the fatal transfer—none after; and some verses written by himself in praise of Eva dancing—they were in imitation of Herrick. These treasures he guarded safely in his old school desk, unopened for fifteen

years, lying at the bottom of the armoire where he kept his clothes. 'If at any time in the future you can recover the respect of which this business has robbed you by using the paper, use it.' The words returned again and again. How should he use it? He might place the paper in the hands of the Governor and leave the matter to him. He might go to him and say, 'I am your old friend. We know what we know, but we trust each other. What I have done I have done.' So thinking, his heart grew soft to that old friend; he said to himself that he must have suffered from thinking of what had been done—but that for Eva's sake—doubtless now his wife—the thing was well done. If it had to be done again, he would do it again, whatever happened.

He thought about nothing else during the four weeks of waiting for the next mail. His heart beat and his cheek glowed when the signal was run up of the mail's arrival. And with the rest of the world, with the acting Governor, the Bishop, the Colonel Commandant, the Legislative Council, and the Heads of Departments, he went down to the quay—he did not, of course, stand with these illustrious persons—he kept himself well behind them in the crowd, and among the half-castes and the coolies—to receive the new Governor.

His Excellency Sir Henry Dunkeld, K.C.M.G., came ashore in the Harbour Master's launch with an awning and a crew of six stout negroes. He was accompanied by his wife, his daughter, a child of twelve, his daughter's governess, and his aide-de-camp. He landed; he shook hands with the Bishop, the Colonel Commandant, and the Heads of Departments; he

presented them to Lady Dunkeld ; the band struck up ; the people shouted and made a lane ; and, bowing right and left, the new Governor marched across the Place to Government House.

Oh, yes ! Jack Longden knew him at once. He was taller and stouter, a man of remarkable height and great dignity of carriage : a handsome man, too : dark of complexion and of regular features : with the set smile of royalty which did not deceive anyone, because behind it there plainly showed a masterful man with whom there must be no trifling ; and though he was well on the sunny side of forty, he had the experienced air of fifty. Oh, yes !—Jack Longden knew him at once. And Lady Dunkeld, too—Eva, of course. Then he had married Eva. Good ! Just as it should have been—Eva ! There she was ; and, after all these years, a lovely woman still. She smiled and bowed, too, and her smile was not the set smile of the Sovereign, but of a gracious lady ; of course, he would have recognised her, too, at once. His heart became very soft watching these old friends of his youth.

He stood back among the crowd of half-castes, negroes, coolies, Chinese, Malays, soldiers and sailors.

His Excellency drew near, Jack leaned forward a little and lifted his hat, not with the idea of catching his eye at all ; but the Governor saw him—he stopped suddenly, turned white and reeled.

‘It is nothing,’ he said, recovering quickly. ‘The heart ; a sudden faintness. Let us go on.’

The procession went on. But the Governor looked back once more into the crowd. For he had seen, after all these years, standing among the common

people, the half-castes and the coolies—himself evidently of small consideration—the old friend of his youth, by whose act and deed and noble self-sacrifice he himself was what he was and where he was. So might King David have recognised in the crowd Jonathan, his former friend, who had heaped kindnesses upon him whom he thought dead and gone long since, but had only gone away and had returned. Yes; there stood Jonathan attired in a white jacket, and a white helmet, bareheaded in the presence of the king.

‘He recognised me,’ said Jonathan, striding away. ‘He caught my eye and he knew me. I saw him change colour and stop. Strange meeting after so many years! He will send for me to-morrow and we shall have a talk. Of course he will trust me still. Should I send him or take him that paper? I think not.’

So, while the new Governor entertained the Legislative Council at a banquet, his old friend sat at dinner in his cottage and contentedly munched his curried beef and drank his sour claret and water, and congratulated himself on the beauty and the happiness of the wife for whose sake he had taken this burden upon himself. In the morning, when he recalled the landing and the recognition, he understood that in the latter there was surprise or dismay, terror—but not a single sign of joy. And he ceased to feel quite so warmly towards his old friend.

IV

So he did nothing. He waited. The new Governor settled down into his office, paid visits to various places in his kingdom, and gained great popularity by his affability, and by the many charms and graces of his wife. But he made no sign at all to his old friend. Yet the Thing was not one of those which can be forgotten in a man's life. That was impossible; and he certainly had recognised the man who had done that thing.

Time went on. Three months passed, and the Governor had made no sign. And now, indeed, Longden fully understood that no sign would be made. 'Good,' he said. 'It is all part of the job. I shall keep silence.'

'I say, Longden,' said his chum, one day, 'I heard something this morning that I should like to tell you.'

'Tell away, old man.'

'It concerns yourself, and I want you not to get angry about it. I think I ought to tell you.'

'I won't get angry. Tell away.'

'I was in the Private Secretary's room, sitting at a separate table, making a *précis* for him. Well, the Governor passed through on his way to his own room. He stopped at the Secretary's table and began to talk—I suppose no one noticed me. He was talking about officers and salaries. Presently, he pointed to a name on the list, and looked at his secretary as much as to say—Who is this?'

'“J. L. Longden,” said the Secretary. “In the Audit Office. He is a very good clerk; indeed, one of the best men we have.”'

'“He has been here a long time.”'

“I think he has no friends at home. There is something against him. Not anything out here—at home, and a long while ago.” Then he told a story about you, Longden. It was something done when you were a boy—or said to have been done. I wish I had got up and declared that you *couldn't* have done it.’

‘You needn't repeat the story,’ said Longden. ‘I believe I have heard most of it before. My brother, the Prig, thought it his duty to tell what he believed to be the truth to somebody in authority at the Colonial Office. So it was told to somebody else, who brought it to the Colonial Secretary here. The story is the property of the Office. They don't often tell it about, because there is never any occasion to mention my name, but when there is any question of promotion they bring it out and look at it. Go on. By the way, the story is only half true, and the half that is true isn't exactly the half that they believe.’

‘Why don't you let them know, then——’

‘Because, my sonny, there are other people to be considered. Meantime, what said the king? How did David the King receive the anecdote?’

‘Why do you always call him David the King?’

‘He does look something like David, doesn't he? Same sort of face—born to command. Soul charged with lofty thoughts, a man after the Lord's own heart—after the Lord's own heart—no guile in him—nothing small. That's why I call him David.’

‘He looks as if nobody could be quite so good. Well, His Excellency heard the story and shook his head. Then he said, slowly and sorrowfully, “There are things which can never be forgotten. Forgiven,”

he added, "they may be, and are, by the persons injured. But forgotten by the world—never. A man who has such a story as this behind him is like a man who is lamed for life. Such an action—such a fall—can never be retrieved. Pity! Pity!" Then he went into his private room and shut the door.'

The man with the shady record laughed. 'Ah!' he said, 'Virtue's only fault, her only weak point, is her unforgivingness; otherwise, she would draw the whole world, like Beauty, with a single hair. King David heard this story for the first time, and it—it shocked his righteousness. Indeed, I do not wonder.'

V

A FEW days after this conversation the postman delivered a letter to John Longden, Audit Office. Now the local post is a very small affair indeed, and to receive a letter between the mails is an event of the greatest rarity. Therefore the other Juniors were astonished, and questioned Longden about his correspondent, and asked her name, and made many facetious conjectures. But Longden dropped the letter into his pocket and nodded cheerfully, and went on with his auditing. When the clock struck four the other clerks made haste to leave their work: Longden lingered. When they were all gone, and not till then, he drew out the letter and looked at it.

'I remember her writing,' he said. 'Of course I remember it. What has she to say? She can know nothing.' He opened the letter.

'Dear Jack,' it began, in the most friendly manner possible. 'Dear Jack'—and from Lady Dunkeld, the

Queen of the Colony, sole consort of King David—why had she not written ‘Dear Jonathan’?—‘I have only just heard that you are in the Colony. I know, and I appreciate the reason, why you have not come to see me. Yet I must see you, if not in my own drawing-room in the presence of the aide-de-camp, then alone. *I must see you.* Come to the private gardens of Government House on Sunday morning at half-past eleven, when the Governor and everybody are at Church. I will meet you beside the Basin. Come. I command you to come in the name of our old affection and for the sake of old times when we were all—God help us!—innocent and hopeful together. Do not fail.

‘Your old friend, E.’

‘I wonder what she means.’ Jack finished the letter, which did not require a second reading, and replaced it in his pocket. What can she mean? She did not recognise me, though he did. People don’t talk about me at Government House. Who told her? If David the King told her, David the King must have felt prickings and stickings of conscience. I will go.’

On Sunday morning the whole official world assists at the Cathedral service. That is to say, the Heads and Assistants of Departments assist. Clerks and Juniors do not count, and nobody heeds whether they attend Church Parade or whether they do not. Therefore, since promotion is not assisted by attending, and since it is cooler under a shady verandah than in a rather crowded church, they mostly stay at home.

Soon after eleven, when the Governor, his

daughter, his daughter's governess, and his aide-de-camp were in their long pew at the Cathedral, and the Bishop was in his throne, and the Civil Chaplain was reading the service, Jack Longden found himself in the private grounds of Government House. They are very beautiful gardens. The Palm House at Kew is not half so beautiful. Palms of all kinds—the cocoa palm, the sago palm, the raphia palm, the screw palm—are there in rows and avenues; there are clusters of bamboos; there are cinnamon trees, spice trees of all kinds; it is a botanical garden, and it contains everything that the tropics produce for the comfort and the joy of man; tea, coffee, indigo, sugar-cane, cloves, sago, pepper, nutmegs, cotton, vanilla, liches, mango, bread-fruit, and papua. There are flowers and shrubs and flowering trees, the flamboyant and the Bougainvilliers and the elephant creeper; there is a lake and there is a stream with water plants of every kind. The garden is provided with seats in all the shady places. It is the noblest garden under the sun. Everything is fine about it except the turf, which only distantly resembles an English lawn. In one corner there is an English garden where they plant only the flowers that will stand the hot sun of the tropics: a weedy rose that puts forth clusters of poor little flowers; sweet peas, mignonette, and some others.

This morning not a soul was in the garden, not even an Indian gardener. To begin with, it was a very hot morning, when every living creature, except the lizards, sought shelter and shade; even in the leafy avenues and narrow shaded paths where the sun could not penetrate, it was breathlessly hot; the sun

was like the mouth of a fiery furnace; the cloudless sky seemed to reflect and beat down heat upon the earth. In the midst of the garden the fountain played and splashed and flashed, suggesting coolness.

Longden found a bench in the shade, and sat down.

He had not long to wait. He heard a footstep, and rose to meet a lady who walked quickly along one of the paths. She was alone.

‘Thank you, Jack,’ she said, smiling gravely but not giving him her hand.

The years had changed the girl into a matron, but her old beauty remained with her, the winning light in her eyes, the caressing tones of her voice, the graciousness of her manner. Jack tried to be cool and collected.

‘I am here, Lady Dunkeld,’ he began, but he broke down. ‘Eva!’ he cried eagerly, ‘you have not forgotten me, then—the man who disgraced himself!’

‘No—no. You are here. I learned the fact only the other day, and you are quite low down in the service. He told me. It is horrible! Oh! it is dreadful! horrible! shameful!’

‘Nay; some must rise and some must fall. And after that ugly business ——’

‘Jack, I know all.’ She looked at him strangely, curiously, inquisitively. ‘*I know all.* I have known the truth for some time.’

‘What do you know? There was an awful row about it.’ Jack wondered what she meant. He went on talking fast in his nervousness. ‘Of course

you heard about it. My father wouldn't have me in the house, and my brother—you remember my brother—he was always an awful prig—he surpassed himself, and made reconciliation impossible, and everything else; so they found me a place out here. My brother kindly told them my little history at the Colonial Office—said he would not assist in hiding a man's record—and so the story came out here, and—that's all. Of course promotion is impossible for a man with such a story as that behind him. Well, Eva—Lady Dunkeld—that is all. What does it matter now?' For his old friend continued to look at him with such wonder and curiosity, and the tears stood in her eyes.

'Oh!' she repeated, 'it is horrible! It is dreadful!'

'No—not so dreadful as you think. One has enough to live upon—it is a quiet life—I want no society—I have no friends—I can live,—what more can a man desire—a man with such a story as that behind him?'

She sat down on the bench beside him, and bowed her head and wept aloud.

'Nay,' he said. 'It is too much that I should revive this old sorrow of so long ago. It is good of you, Eva, to feel for one who really deserves all he got.'

'Jack!' She sprang to her feet again. 'You tear my very heart! You tear me to pieces! For I know all—all—I tell you that I know all!'

'You cannot know all. It is impossible.'

'I have known it for ten years. God forgive us! For ten years. And we have not done justice to you!

He fell ill and was on the point of death and confessed it all to me. I promised, thinking he was on his deathbed, to carry his message of remorse. He did not die, but the message remains. Take it. His message of remorse and self-upbraiding. His prayer for forgiveness.'

'Yes—but he got better,' said Longden dryly. 'So he told you, did he? It was not well done. It was a breach of confidence. Why, it was in the thought that you would never know——'

'And I do know. Jack—nothing that he can do or say could destroy the wrong of all these years.'

'Nothing. And yet, you see, I took the consequences, whatever they might be. They did turn out rather more unpleasant than I thought. But I have not complained.'

'If you were to stand up to-morrow and read aloud the confession which he gave you, that would not give you back these lost and ruined years.'

'No,' said Jack. 'It might astonish people more than a bit. But it wouldn't help me.'

'Have you ever thought that—about this sublime self-sacrifice of your youth—that all of it would be destroyed and rendered worse than useless were it to become known?'

'I quite understand. To be sure, I have always looked forward to a time when, somehow or other, without hurting you, my character should be set right again—if only to disappoint my brother, who is a prig.'

'He, who was then a young man, like yourself, with his future all before him, is now a man who has succeeded; he has won distinction and reputation;

he has a wife and children—children, Jack. If you ruin him—as you may—as you can—you ruin the children and you destroy the wife.’

‘I see,’ he replied. ‘This is what you wanted to say to me? To be sure, I hadn’t considered that.’

‘When we landed he saw you on the port and recognised you. He said nothing to me—at the time, but I perceived that he was anxious and unhappy. It is three months ago, and during the whole time he has been in an agony of terror and remorse. A few days ago he heard the old story told again—the story that he thought forgotten was repeated to him, attached to your name. It is common property—the talk of his secretaries. He is well-nigh mad with the recollection and the hideousness of it.’

‘Confound the story! That’s my brother’s doing.’

‘I told him I should see you. He has gone to Church this morning—to Church!—knowing that I am to meet you here. What am I to tell him?’

‘Why,’ said Jack, ‘considering that it is three months since he came and that I have not made any sign, he might take it for granted that I am not going to move or to speak. I don’t deny, Eva, that when I heard he was coming I was a good bit shaken. It did seem—but there: I had taken the consequences and had no right to complain—not the least right; and if I had moved I should have been the—the skunk—which the world believes me to have been—I beg your pardon, Eva.’

‘No—no. My husband—in your presence I can say so—was that creature. Go on, Jack.’

‘I thought that I might send him a copy of the confession and ask him what he proposed doing. I say that this temptation did assail me—I am ashamed to own that it did——’

‘Jack’—she interrupted him quickly—‘there is no safety possible for us so long as that paper remains in your hands. Consider. You may die : you may fall ill : you may even—God forgive me for saying so—fall away from your promise and betray us. The punishment may prove too hard for you. The noblest inheritance of my children is their father’s honour. It lies at the mercy of an accident. His honour ! Think of what it is to him—to me—to all of us ! Do not leave that to chance. There is but one person in the world who can prove the truth—it is yourself. There is in the world but one proof of the truth—it is that paper. After you were gone there were some who could not understand, and some who said openly that they might have believed it of him but never of you. There was one man—the Doctor—who said he could prove that you were elsewhere at the time when the thing was done. But the time has long passed by when inquiry might have revealed the truth. No one can hurt him now except you ; and you only through that paper.’

He made no reply. She went on again more passionately :

‘Give me that paper, that there be no trace left of the horrible business. Put it beyond the power of chance to reveal the thing. Put it beyond your own power, most loyal of men, to betray and to ruin us. Leave to my children their father’s honour : leave him to follow out his career to the end. Will you do this

—for me—for my children—in memory of the past?’

Then Jack spoke—slowly, because he was anxious to speak for once and so to have done with it.

‘When I read in the paper that he was coming I heard his voice, plain and clear, saying, “Take my confession. Do what you like with it. If you suffer from the consequences of your sacrifice, reveal it. If, in the future you can regain the respect of the world by means of this paper, use it. You have the right to use it.” Those were his words. No—let me finish—I will not be long. When I saw him land, I say, his words came back to me. He saw me. Then I waited. For, you see, I could not use his confession. How could I use it? Could I threaten with it—demand promotion with it—extort money with it? Then I learned, by accident, the other day how his Private Secretary told him the story—my story—his story—and how he set his face hard and said in his grandly austere way, as if no temptation had ever overcome him—as if there was no crime on his soul, “that some things can never be forgotten, that they cling to a man through life and hinder him.” Now I do think, making every allowance for official purity, that he was carrying virtue at that moment to an extreme. But it made me deliberate what to do next. And I have found out the way. It is all clear to me at last.’

‘What way? In the name of Pity, what way?’

‘If I had been the Governor and he had been the Junior clerk, I should have tried to make up to him, quietly and without explanations, for all these years, by such advancement as lay in my power. I

should have done this for him in order to let him know that the past was buried, but the sense of the sacrifice was left.'

'He has not done this, because he has been afraid. He is afraid to meet you. He is afraid to speak to you.'

'Out of his fears lest the man who has done what I have done—who has been silent all these years—who has suffered as I have suffered—in silence—should at last change his character and become a cad!'

'Do not be too bitter, Jack.'

'I say that he might have played the part of the Providence which mitigates the cold blast of ill-luck. He has preferred to play the part of the Judge who did the thing, yet carries out the law with relentless hand and heart unmoved upon the man found guilty by the jury. Well, my way is plain. I have brought the papers—here they are. I had some kind of instinct that they might be wanted.' He drew an envelope out of his pocket. 'I will give them to you, Lady Dunkeld, on one condition.'

'Any condition—all conditions.'

'Nay—this is a very simple condition. It is that during the whole of his official residence here your husband will leave me absolutely and strictly alone. Let him never interfere with me; let him never have speech with me; let him never offer me any promotion. He must not, on the other hand, cause that story to be spread about more than it has been; he must compass neither good nor harm for me. Let him no longer exist for me. You promise this, Eva—for your husband?'

'Yes—yes! I promise upon my—upon his—'

honour, which now—' she snatched the paper from his hands and caught her breath—' nothing—nothing—nothing can touch. Oh ! now I breathe again ! Conditions ? Ask the whole of my fortune. Ask all we have—you shall have it so long as I have this paper. You are certain that there is no copy ? '

' There is no copy—you are quite safe. If I were to proclaim the whole truth to-morrow on the Place before Government House, no one would believe a word of it, and ignominious dismissal would be my reward.'

' We are safe ! ' She sat down and panted with heaving breast. ' We are safe ! Oh ! Jack—my poor, brave, long-suffering friend ! What can I say ? That I can never thank you enough ? That is a poor thing to say. Yet what else am I to say ? Why, I can never tell anyone. My husband's honour is safe : what else can I say ? You will not ask me what I—I—think of this story, will you ? Oh ! you have done a most noble thing, and I cannot even tell my children. I can tell nobody. All your life long you will suffer --and I can tell nobody. You are living in contumely, and I cannot even offer to relieve you. Nothing can relieve you. The consequences continue. One man has sinned and another goes in obscurity all his life for that sin. Go, Jack ! On our heads lies the real shame, the bitterness and the remorse. That is our punishment. I am not worthy to touch your hand ; ' but she sank on her knees and kissed his hand. Then she stood up with streaming eyes. ' Go, Jack ! I will give him the paper. We will keep your conditions.'

He lifted his hat and turned without another word. So they parted, who will never meet again.

VI

THE monotony of Longden's life, broken in this manner, began again. There were no more disturbances; he fell back upon the old routine, after this little digression. The conditions were kept. The Governor took no notice of him at all. The slow time passed by. Sir Henry Dunkeld drew near to the end of his time. Jack was now past forty—still an assistant clerk—still sitting among the Juniors, yet still cheerful of speech and aspect; still, to outward seeming, as contented as the most successful of men; still living in his packing-case shanty near the sea-shore—sometimes alone, sometimes with some young fellow as his messmate. Long since the youngster who messed with him when Sir Henry Dunkeld arrived had passed him on the ladder of promotion and had joined a mess which belonged to society, and where they gave dinners and had afternoons and got up picnics and went to balls.

One day, a little while before this Governor left the colony, Longden's chief sent for him.

'I ought to tell you, Longden,' he said, 'that an attempt has been made to get you promoted. You have been most strongly recommended to His Excellency for the vacant post—' it was that of Assistant Auditor-General. 'It was pointed out that there is no one in the office who possesses anything like your knowledge and experience——' Here the chief paused.

'Well?' Longden asked, carelessly.

'The attempt proved useless.'

'He will not give me any promotion?'

‘That is so. I fear that your case is a very hopeless one, Longden. You know that there is a certain story—the Governor has been told—I need not——’

‘You need not,’ said Longden. ‘I understand perfectly. I have always understood. I do not, I assure you, expect any promotion. At the same time I am much obliged to you for kindly making an effort for me.’

‘Perhaps—Sir Henry’s time draws to a close—perhaps the next Governor——’

‘Perhaps,’ said Longden, and withdrew.

Presently that Governor went home, taking with him his wife and daughter. And another Governor came out.

And in the morning Jack Longden, in his white jacket and pith helmet, trudged in the heat and the dust to his office—all the other men being able to drive—and in the evening he went back to his cottage by the sea; and at night in his loneliness he listened to the plash of the water on the coral reef and the moaning of the filhaos in the cemetery, and no promotion came to him and no one took the least notice of him. But he remained cheerful of aspect and of talk, and as contented as the Colonial Secretary himself.

VII

THE other day I met a man at the club, an old acquaintance; and we began to talk about other old acquaintances, which is the only topic of conversation open to those who are old acquaintances but not old friends.

Said he, presently: 'Did you know Canon Longden?'

'No; he was a good bit before my time, I think.'

'Not a bad sort, but too good, you know. Much too good for the common lot of us. Carried his goodness to unforgivingness. A prig of virtue. That's what I always thought of him. He irritated one, you know, by his unreasonable hatred of the wicked world—used really and truly to despise sinners. Now I like a man who has some little feeling for the slips and the stumbles—eh? As if he might slip and stumble himself. Most of us have, if the truth was known. Well, as far as he's concerned, it doesn't matter much—though I don't know. Canon Longden's dead.'

'Is he?' I replied, not much interested.

'Yes. He owned quite a tidy little property near us. Had no children, and was a widower, and was not on speaking terms with his only brother. We rather expected he would have left it for Objects, you know—Objects—Religious Objects—converting niggers or locking up sinners for ever without any let up; or building churches and such.'

'Well, didn't he?'

'Not a bit of it. He forgot to make a will at all, and so the property goes, I hear, to this younger brother who was packed off to some miserable colonial appointment, years ago, after getting into a devil of a mess. His father cut him out of his will—I don't exactly know what he did—and his brother would never speak to him or hear about him: and now he is coming home to take all the family money. So the

prig of virtue has ended in enriching the sinner. I remember Jack Longden well—and a better youngster never lived. How he came to do it, whatever it was he did—the stories differ—how such a glorious boy as he was, full of life and generosity and promise, came to do it—but *there!*’

A man who had been sitting near us by the fire-side rose and walked quickly down the room.

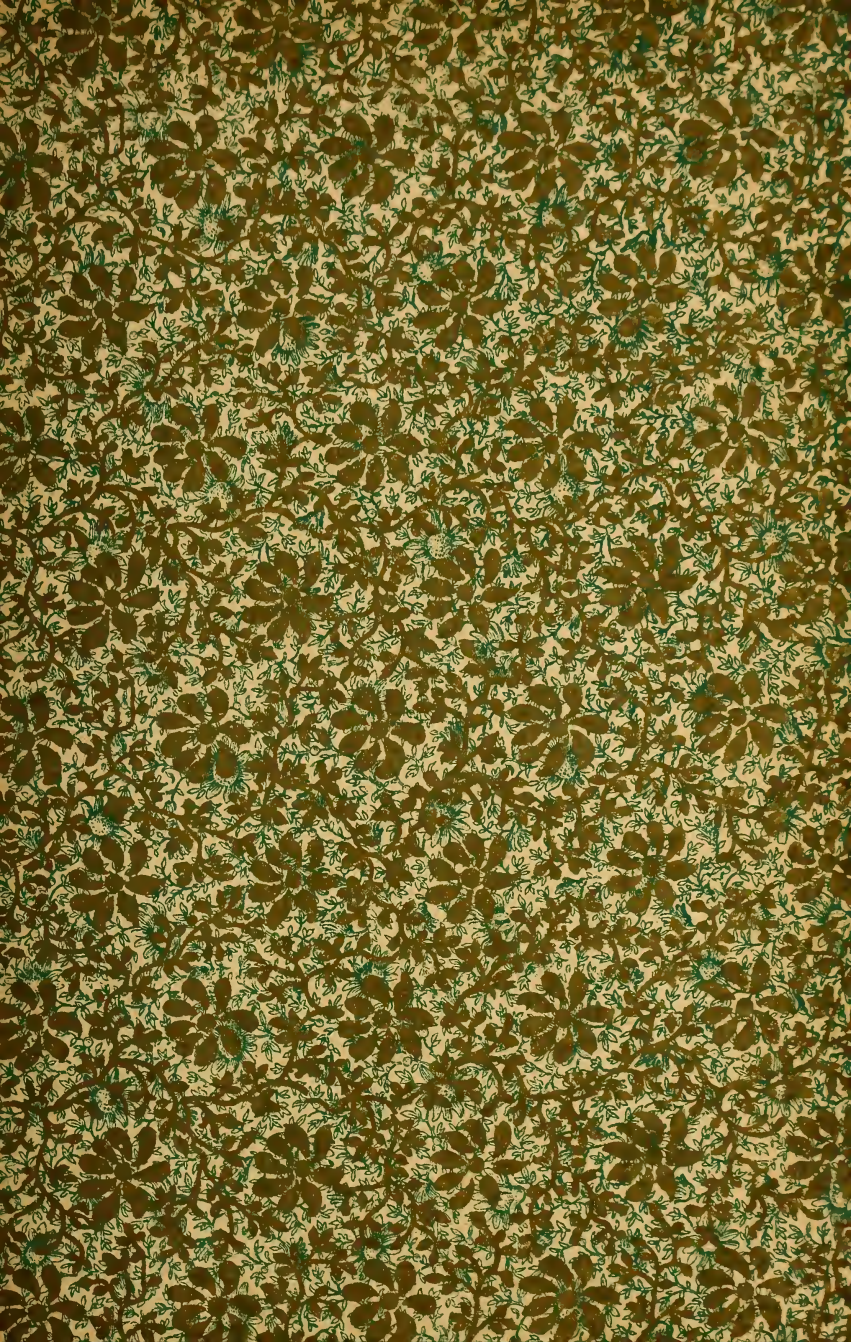
‘Know him? That is Sir Henry Dunkeld, G.C.B. and G.C.M.G. Been Governor of half Her Majesty’s Colonies, one after the other. No end of a swell, he is. Another prig of virtue too. Going to be made a Peer, I believe. I say, when this colonial chap, this Jack Longden, comes to live on his property, I suppose the people won’t be raking up past scandals, will they? It’s wonderful, though, how things stick. I shouldn’t wonder if they refused to call upon him.’



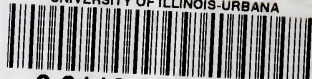
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